

# DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 270

EA 019 492

**AUTHOR** Zerchykov, Ross  
**TITLE** Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research. [Parent Choice and the Public Schools: Volume 1]  
**INSTITUTION** Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, Mass.  
**SPONS AGENCY** Department of Education, Washington, DC.  
**PUB DATE** Feb 87  
**NOTE** 148p.; For related documents, see EA 019 493-495.  
**AVAILABLE FROM** Publication Sales, Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215 (\$9.00).  
**PUB TYPE** Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)  
**EDRS PRICE** MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.  
**DESCRIPTORS** Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; \*Institutional Characteristics; Parent Participation; \*Parent School Relationship; \*Public Schools; Research Utilization; \*School Choice

## ABSTRACT

This guide, first in a series of four volumes, is designed to give information to parents and other decision makers on costs and benefits of different kinds of choices of schools that children might attend. Four sections present digests of information based on research and evaluation studies. Section 1 introduces the format and purpose of the guide. Section 2, "Policy Models," digests six frequently cited policy proposals for parent choice, ranging from Milton Friedman's call in 1962 for a universal voucher system to the National Governors' Association call in 1986 for state and local initiatives for "controlled choice." As the models indicate, parent choice plans can take many forms; some raise questions about private education, church, state, and/or individual liberty issues. "The Issues and the Evidence," section 3, contains seven research summaries that digest evidence addressing the claims and questions raised in policy proposals summarized in section 2, including what is known about the potential impact of expanding opportunities for parent choice. Section 4, "The Research Base," contains succinct briefs summarizing the 11 major research and evaluation studies whose findings provide most of the clues for answering questions addressed in the research summaries. Section 5, "Bibliographic Resources," contains a summary of the sources cited in the report. (CJH)

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# Parent Choice

## A Digest of the Research



**Ross Zerchykov**

**Institute for Responsive Education**

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**PARENT CHOICE:  
A DIGEST OF THE RESEARCH**

**by Ross Zerchykov**

**February 1987**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was developed as part of a project funded by the U.S. Department of Education (Project No. 00-85-104-14). Our thanks to the Department for their support and encouragement. All opinions herein are those of the authors and not necessarily the U.S. Department of Education.

Ross Zerchykov, Research Director of the Institute for Responsive Education, directed this project and authored this handbook. Zerchykov, a doctoral candidate in political science at Boston University, has been project director for Equity and Choice, IRE's triquarterly journal, and has also authored School Boards and The Communities they Represent, A Citizen's Notebook for Effective Schools, and Managing Decline in Public School Systems: A Handbook.

Other handbooks produced by this project were authored by Laura Ferguson and Ross Zerchykov. Owen Heleen, Publications Director, edited the series of publications; Mary Westropp provided research assistance; and Catherine Baker and Betsy Bigelow provided word processing and secretarial support.

## FOREWORD

### An Introduction to the Series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools"

by Ross Zerchykov,

Research Director, Institute for Responsive Education

What determines where children in America go to school? In the vast majority of cases, it is where they and their parents live. But, amidst all the current debate about excellence in education, we never hear of an educational reason why public school children are most often assigned to schools on the basis of place of residence. This system has serious ramifications for equality in our society.

In this and the other four volumes in our series "Parent Choice and the Public Schools," we examine the question: Why must where a family can afford to buy or rent housing be the determining factor in where a child goes to school?

We hope this series of publications will be helpful to all those -- parents and taxpayers, school leaders and government officials -- who are beginning to question this connection between education and real estate.

One obvious explanation for the connection (other than inertia) is cost: assignment by residency is relatively simple and holds down administrative and transportation costs, thereby freeing up resources for curriculum and instruction. Arguments

against parent choice as an alternative assignment model often also invoke concern that parent choice could lead to racial resegregation and/or exacerbate socioeconomic segregation. Furthermore, some say increased choice would only be exercised by the more informed, active and educationally ambitious of parents, thereby leading to some schools becoming hotbeds of parent support and involvement, while others become pockets of apathy.

Opening up choice among schools, others argue, would invigorate all schools through competition. Indifferent schools would no longer attract parents and, as in the business world, would go out of business to be replaced by other, more "responsive" schools.

Such claims, when repeated often enough, can begin to sound like self-evident truths. The first of our series of publications, Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, is designed to shed some light on the costs and benefits of different kinds of parent choice and provide summary answers to the most frequently asked questions about parent choice, based on an analysis of the research and evaluation studies of various parent choice initiatives in the United States, including voucher experiments, magnet schools, public schools of choice and open enrollment programs. The answers, as always, are not definitive or tidy, and some questions can never be answered within the limits of experimentation in education (e.g., what would be the impact of a totally free market in education? -- would consumer sovereignty and the resulting competition equalize opportunities,



and would the resulting competition lead to innovation and excellence? Or, would suppliers in the educational market, like suppliers in all markets, strive to restrict competition?')

Nonetheless, the research evidence is instructive and tells us enough to sift through and put aside some of the claims and counter-claims about choice.

One such claim that could be used to justify the current system of assigning pupils to schools on the basis of residence is that parents don't want anything else. They like the "neighborhood school," as witnessed by community opposition to school closings and "forced busing." And, some contend, choice is irrelevant anyway since, basically, all parents want the same thing: good schools and a good education for their children.

Contrary evidence, however, comes from data in the Gallup Poll on education showing that a significant majority of parents want more choice. (Phi Delta Kappan, September 1986)

But, for local citizens and school leaders, nationally aggregated opinions are less important than local sentiment. One way to find out if local parents want more choice is to simply ask them. A method for doing so, for identifying whether parents want more choice, under what conditions, and what kinds of education they would choose is described in the second volume in our series, Planning for Parent Choice, which offers a step-by-step guide to surveying parents, and provides a method and a survey instrument that has been used over a period of five years in four Massachusetts urban school districts.

There is research evidence, especially from the intensive evaluation of 1970s voucher experiments in Alum Rock, California and other locations, which does show that there is cause for the concern that not all groups of parents participate equally in choice programs, that, in fact, more informed (and affluent) parents are more likely to participate in, and hence benefit from, increased opportunities for parent choice. In those cases, the "information deficits" suffered by parents were attributed to schools disseminating information only in the form of print material in the English language. These dissemination strategies may have been appropriate for middle-class, white-collar settings but were not effective for poor or linguistic minority parents. Current practices, happily, are more sensitive to the different ways that information reaches different kinds of parent populations.

The third volume in this series is a Parent Information Strategies providing short profiles, with nuts- and-bolts kind of information, about the range of exemplary parent information strategies from 21 school districts in 11 states across the nation.

Our fourth volume, A Consumer's Guide to Schools of Choice addresses parents who are in the enviable position of being able to choose but could use help in making the right fit between their aspirations and values and a particular school. This guide is intended to give such parents real-life descriptions of what actually goes on in schools of choice. What is different in

schools that advertise themselves as having an emphasis on a particular style or philosophy of teaching -- i.e., "basic skills" or "classical education" or "child-centered, developmental approach" -- or a particular curricular emphasis, i.e., "the arts" or "science and technology?" The Consumer's Guide elaborates the assumptions about how children learn that lie behind such labels and provides a checklist that enables parents to decide whether their aspirations for and knowledge about their children will match up with the labels that diversified public schools of choice use in describing themselves. The Consumer's Guide sketches daily activities in ten schools in six different school districts in Massachusetts and New York.

Such illustrations belie the general assumption that all parents want the same kind of "good education," an assumption that can and has been used as an argument against providing expanded opportunities for parent choice. The vignettes are all taken from public schools of choice, many of which have long waiting lists, indicating that many parents have a desire for more options than are currently available.

We don't pretend to have all the answers to the puzzle facing local school decision-makers -- school and government officials and parents and citizens -- as they consider ways to respond to the growing desire for more choice of some kind. Neither do we believe that parent choice will solve all of the educational problems facing our nation today. Rather, we prefer

to remain open-minded and offer this publication and its companion volumes to other open-minded readers -- government officials (at all levels), school administrators, and parents and taxpayers -- who have questioned whether we should assign all students to the same kinds of schools on the basis of residency and not according to parental aspirations or children's learning styles.

## SECTION ONE:

### INTRODUCTION AND USER'S GUIDE

This report is for decisionmakers, who have either interest in or responsibility for responding to the renewed wave of official and public interest in expanding the opportunities for parents to choose the schools that their children might attend. By decisionmakers we mean two groups of readers: (1) public officials -- either legislators or public officials at the federal, state or local levels of government, including local school boards and administrators, and (2) concerned citizens, whether parents or taxpayers, whose opinions can help guide or limit public officials' response to the puzzles and opportunities of parent choice in education. The subsequent four sections present digests of four kinds of information that are intended to help these decisionmakers make sense of a perplexing variety of perspectives, claims and evidence about parent choice in education.

"Section Two: Policy Models" digests six oft-cited policy proposals for parent choice, ranging from Milton Friedman's call in 1962 for a universal voucher system to the more modest National Governors' Association call in 1986 for state and local initiatives for "controlled choice." This section attempts to lay out what parent choice means to whom. Choice in education appears to carry different shades of meaning. The concept has become embroiled in debates about

government subsidies for private education; about whether or not magnet schools are a necessary and/or sufficient means for promoting desegregation; about whether magnets create a two-tier system of extra-funded, elite vs. ordinary schools; and about debates over the proper line separating church or individual parents and children and the state. But, as models of choice profiled in Section Two reveal, parent choice plans can take many forms. Some do raise questions about private education, church, state and/or individual liberty issues; others do not. Still others, by proposing universal choice among all schools in the public sector, seek to universalize the benefits of magnet education by in effect suggesting that each public school should be seen and treated as a magnet school.

"Section Three: The Issues and the Evidence" contains seven research summaries that digest the evidence that speak to the claims and questions raised in the various policy proposals summarized in Section Two. The first three research summaries provide clues as to what is and isn't known about how parents respond to choice when it is available. These research summaries attempt to answer such questions as:

1. What are the financial costs of expanding parent choice?
2. Do parents want more choice? What kinds of parents are more apt to want and to exercise choice?
3. What factors influence how parents make choices? And are there systematic differences among different racial/ethnic or socioeconomic groups in the kinds of education that parents

prefer?

The remaining four research summaries digest what is known about the potential impact of expanding opportunities for parent choice, addressing such questions as:

4. Would choice promote equity?
5. Would choice promote diversity and competition among schools?
6. Would choice promote school improvement? What is the relationship between educational choice and student outcomes?
7. Would choice improve school-parent/community relations? Does choice make schools more accountable and responsive to parents? Does it lead to greater parental involvement? Will it strengthen or weaken public support for public education?

"Section Four: The Research Base" contains succinct 1-2 page briefs summarizing the 11 major research and evaluation studies whose findings and conclusions provide most of the clues for answering seven questions addressed in the research summaries.

"Section Five: Bibliographic Resources" contains a summary of the sources cited in the report, including some secondary sources.

The bibliography presented in Section Five should not be seen as a comprehensive reading list. Because this report is aimed at decisionmakers -- and not scholars, legal analysts, philosophers, or bibliophiles -- its sources do not encompass the voluminous literature that has been produced on the topic of parent choice (especially on vouchers).

Our search, screening and analysis of the bibliographic sources

were guided by the practical information needs of decisionmakers. First, our tracking of the issues in the flurry of position papers and public statements raised by recent federal and state initiatives for parent choice (e.g., National Governors' Association Hearings and Report) revealed the persistent influence, at least at the level of ideas, of the policy models profiled in Section Two.

Our analysis of those models, asking the question "What problems does this model attempt to address?" and our analysis of the secondary sources supporting or criticizing those models, suggested the foci of the seven research summaries contained in Section Three.

These seven foci were then applied as a screen to the issues and research and evaluation report literature unearthed as a result of a computerized search of the literature indexed in ERIC (the U.S. Department of Education-funded Educational Resources Information Center) current through May of 1986. The scope of our ERIC search included several bodies of relevant literature including studies and theories about: parent choice; vouchers and tuition-tax credits; open-enrollment plans; general analyses of market mechanisms as they apply to public services and comparisons of "command" or "bottom-up" versus "market-like" approaches to accountability and improvement in public services like schooling; magnet and alternative public schools; and relevant comparative studies of public vs. private education. Our screening procedure resulted in a highly selective and focused list of sources. With respect to our use of these sources, our focus was not on the whole of any given study but rather on those parts of it which



shed light on the practical decisionmaker concerns expressed in the seven topical areas covered in the research summaries.

A similar concern for practical utility guided the organization and format of this report. Rather than attempting a grand synthesis of what is known about the topic of choice, we provide a series of discrete summaries of the major set of ideas, evidence and studies on this topic. The report is organized so that each of the summaries -- the profiles of the major policy models, the research summaries of the evidence, and the briefs of major studies -- can be used as discrete and stand-alone handouts and/or elements of an individualized "briefing packet" constructed by any reader. For example, each provides cross-references to the briefs of those studies which provide the most crucial clues to answering questions posed, and the bibliography's annotations provide further information about the secondary sources cited.

Hence, we hope that this report can be used instead of just read. It does not pretend to tell decisionmakers what to do; nor does it give them all of the answers. It does, however, offer some "already done homework" on some of the recurring issues what will inevitably arise in planning for expanding opportunities for parent choice.

## SECTION TWO: POLICY MODELS

This section addresses the questions: what does parent choice mean? and How can we imagine or conceive of its implementation? It offers short expository profiles of seven of the most often cited and influential policy models, including:

1. The "unregulated voucher" plan proposed by the economist Milton Friedman in 1962. This policy model is still the touchstone for much discussion about parent choice.
2. The "regulated voucher" as designed under the auspices of the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity by Christopher Jencks and his colleagues in 1970 and as implemented, albeit in a modified way, in a number of sites most notably in the Alum Rock school district in California.
3. Mario Fantini's 1972 model of "public schools of choice."
4. John Coons and Stephen Sugarman's 1978 model of "family choice in education," a version of the "regulated voucher."
5. Proposals for "peaceful uses of vouchers," in which vouchers are provided to special populations for special purposes as in the U.S. Department of Education's 1985 proposal for Chapter 1 vouchers. (The Equity and Choice Act -- TEACH).
6. The National Governors' Association 1986 model of "controlled" choice.

Because our focus throughout this "digest" is on how and why

expanding parent choice could improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of public education, we include in our analysis neither the proposals nor the limited evidence on tuition or credit schemes as a way of expanding parent choice.

Our reasons for these exclusions are as follows:

First, the evidence is very limited. A Congressional study of the potential impact of various tuition tax credits showed that the major beneficiaries would be parents who are currently purchasing private education. This conclusion was supported by the findings of a Rand Corporation study of Minnesota's tax credit initiative which showed that -- as opposed to the contentions of opponents of tuition tax credits who argue that it would lead to large-scale abandonment of public education -- tuition tax credits do not influence family's educational choices; they mostly provide some financial relief to families who have already chosen to purchase education from the private sector.

Second, based on the evidence as summarized above, tuition tax credit plans will probably not create competitive pressures strong enough to change and improve public schools' behavior and practice.

Three, the extant literature in support of tuition tax credits does not make any claims about the benefits that will accrue to public education in general. Instead, proposals in support of tuition tax credits focus on individual rights-based claims and evidence are outside of the stipulated focus of this work. Our study is concerned with the "public regarding" and not "private regarding" impacts of

various proposals to expand parent choice.

The six models we will review were chosen because they demonstrate the variety of approaches covered by the term "parent choice". They were also chosen because they have provided much of the vocabulary -- the conceptual ammunition -- for contemporary discussions of parent choice.

The underlying issue in many of the debates about parent choice is the question "Whose kid is it anyway?"

Posing just that question in testimony before the National Governors' Association Task Force on Parent Involvement and Choice, Thomas Ascik (1986) presented an uncompromising argument for the widest possible degree of parent choice. Ascik argued that if we ask ourselves "Whose kid is it anyway?" then we "cannot avoid the political question of the right of parents to determine the content of their children's upbringing and the corresponding questions [of] when and why the state should interfere with this right. It is not unpatriotic for parents to assert this right. It is only natural for them to do so." (Ascik, 1986:2)

Continuing to assert that "families are more important than schools" and that "the public interest in the family is greater than the public interest in education," Ascik (1986:6) goes on to argue for a universal voucher scheme, concluding that "under a voucher, public policy patronizes the authority of parents to choose. What choices parents actually make become secondary."

The legal and constitutional (as opposed to philosophical) basis

for the "rights" and "authority" invoked in Ascik's argument rests in large part on an interpretation of the 1925 Supreme Court decision, Pierce v. Society of Sisters, which declared that while states could enforce compulsory education, they could not compel families to go to only public schools, provided that the private schools met state standards for quality and a common basic education.

That proviso about "standards" and state interest right to enforce them is the basis for some equally stark and uncompromising arguments against almost any further extension of family choice in education.

For example, Ackerman (1984), in answer to the question "Whose kid is it anyway?" argues that "parents don't own their kids" since in a liberal state nobody "owns" anybody and that "education is not horticulture." A liberal education in a pluralistic society, Ackerman contends, should expose children to beliefs and group values different from that of their parents, and that the danger of parent choice is that it allows parents to practice "horticulture," trying to reproduce or "grow" their children in their own image.

Similar arguments have been advanced by R. Freeman Butts in a series of attempts to articulate a concept of "civic education" (Butts, 1985). Butts argues that parental choice can work against the necessary conditions for a common education: "Children should not be separated from one another into segregated private parochial or public schools. It is extremely important for pluralistic groups to learn from each other through study and participation together." (Butts, 1985:62)

And, echoing U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett's concern for a common content of education, including civic values and character education (Bennett, 1985), Butts asserts that: "Schools should be training grounds for acquiring the sense of community that will hold the political system together." (Butts, 1985:60)

This provides the premise for the argument, contra Ascik, that there is a public interest in education, at least equal to the "public interest in families," and the family's interest in education:

"The primary focus of the schools should be on the civic values that pertain to the public life of the community and not on the private values of religious belief, or personal lifestyles that individuals should be free to chose -- but not to impose on others." (Butts, 1985:60)

A similar emphasis on the public functions as opposed to the private benefits of schooling underlies Pacheco's (1980) critique of the Coons-Sugarman "family-choice" model (Coons and Sugarman, 1978) -- another of the policy proposals reviewed below. Pacheco faults Coons and Sugarman for not paying adequate attention to the public functions of schooling, functions which do create a compelling public interest in the choices parents would make and the impact of those choices on public policy objectives and societal functions of schooling.

The six policy models profiled in the next few pages can be seen to differ primarily in the extent to which they are concerned with, or circumscribe, the choices parents would be able to make. The policy models, although quite disparate in the scope of choice they propose,

are united in identifying a core set of social benefits advanced by the various proposals for choice.

## MODEL ONE:

### THE UNREGULATED VOUCHER

#### Primary Source and Reference

The basic model is contained in a short, 14-page section of economist Milton Friedman's, Capitalism and Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) entitled "The Role of Government in Education." The entire section is reprinted in full in G.R. LaNoue, editor, Educational Vouchers: Concepts and Controversies (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), pages 8-20. Page references in the following profile refer to the latter.

#### Scope of Choice

The voucher would be available to all families of school-age children. It could be redeemed at any school private or public, for-profit or non-profit, sectarian or non-denominational, provided the school meets certain, unspecified, minimal standards.

#### The Model of Choice

Friedman's model begins with a recognition that a common education is a public good rather than a private investment. He states, "the gain from the education of a child accrues not only to the child, or his parents, but also to other members of the society" (Friedman, 1972:9). This social gain, because of its "neighborhood effects", established the obligation and necessity of governments to fund

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FROM: Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, prepared by the Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, (617) 353-3309. Work on this publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Grant No. 0085-104-14. The analyses and opinions expressed herein do not however necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

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education.

"Neighborhood effects" is an economist's term for circumstances under which "the action of one individual imposes significant costs on individuals for which it is not feasible to make him compensate them, or yields significant gains to other individuals for which it is not feasible to make them compensate him -- circumstances that make voluntary exchange impossible." (Friedman, 1972:9)

A common education which integrates children into citizenship, literacy and an ongoing social order (note the affinity with R. Freeman Butts, an opponent of parent choice) is a prime example of a "neighborhood effects" gain. As such, it justifies government financing of education. But, argues Friedman, it does not thereby oblige government to directly administer and run educational institutions which provide this social benefit. Having made this distinction, Friedman goes on to articulate the main points of his model:

1. We should be ready to separate government financing from government administration of schools.
2. Governments could finance education by giving families of school-age children vouchers for "a specified sum [of money], per year per child" (p.9) that would be "equal to the estimated cost of educating a child in a public school" (p.15), and that would be redeemable at any "approved" institution that met certain minimum standards. (p.12)

The "unregulated" nature of this model stems from the provision

that:

3. The approved institution could be a private enterprise or government -- i.e., public -- school, a private non-profit, sectarian, or non-sectarian institution;
4. All parents, not just the needy, and including current subscribers to privately-financed schooling would have a right to such a voucher, and parents could supplement the value of the voucher with "any additional sum they themselves provided in purchasing educational services from an 'approved' institution of their choice" (p.12)
5. As a corollary of the above, "approved" institutions would be free to charge tuition above and beyond the cash values of the voucher -- the above mentioned, but never defined, "estimated cost of educating a child in a public school."

### The Problem

The existing government monopoly on the administration of publicly-funded schooling leads to an unfair and inefficient allocation of resources in education. In trying to be responsive to some parents, schools add extra programs and services and offer them to all parents whether they called for them or not. This is inefficient. It is also unfair because those add-ons go beyond the public interest in a common education (although they do respond to parents' private interest) and as such cannot be justified by the "neighborhood effects" rule of taxing everybody for gains that

everybody benefits from. (Friedman, 1972:15)

### Benefits

1. Choice and Diversity: Competition would increase the availability of educational approaches that are experimental or no longer in favor, if enough parents are interested: "... this is a special case of the general principle that a market permits each to satisfy his own taste -- effective proportional representation; whereas the political process imposes conformity" (Friedman, 1972:15).
2. Choice and School-Parent Relationships: The voucher idea would make schools more accountable because "parents can vote with their feet" (p.13) and it would be easier for individual schools to be more responsive to parents "... The parent who would prefer to see money used for better teachers and texts rather than coaches and corridors, has no way of expressing this preference except by persuading the majority to change the mixture for all." (Friedman, 1972:15)
3. Choice and Public Support for Public Schools: The voucher would eliminate one source of opposition on the part of non-public school parents, e.g. parochial school parents' disinclination to support increased expenditures for schooling.
4. Choice and Equity: The voucher concept merely extends the choices now available to the affluent -- to go to private schools, or to derive the benefits of going to "good" schools

by buying housing in an expensive neighborhood -- to all parents.

### Implementation and Evaluation Information

Nothing precisely like the unregulated voucher model with its direct "funding" of families has ever been attempted anywhere, so evaluation data is non-existent. There are some examples in other democratic countries -- "free" schools in Denmark, the co-existence of publicly-supported government and sectarian schools in the Netherlands, for example -- which approximate some aspects of the voucher idea. These examples are reviewed in (Doyle, 1984).

## MODEL TWO:

### THE REGULATED VOUCHER

#### Primary Source and Reference

During the late 1960's, a series of developments, most notably the civil rights and community control of schools movements, led the United States Office of Economic Opportunity to commission the Center for the Study of Public Policy to conduct a detailed study of how "education vouchers" might empower the poor and minorities. That study resulted in Education Vouchers: A Report on Financing Education By Payments to Parents published in December 1970.\*

#### Scope of Choice

As is the case with Milton Friedman's "unregulated vouchers" choice would extend to public and private schools. Vouchers given directly to parents and redeemable at their school of choice would, as in the case of Friedman's model, mean that "parents would not longer be forced to send their children to the school around the corner simply because it was around the corner" (Areen and Jencks, 1972:51).

Like Friedman's proposal, the regulated voucher concept's

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\*A useful condensation can be found in Areen, J. and Jencks, C. (1972) "Education Vouchers: A Proposal for Diversity and Choice" in G.R. LaNoue, editor, Education Vouchers: Concepts and Controversies, New York: Teachers College Press. All page references herein are to the above summary.

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FROM: Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, prepared by the Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, (617) 353-3309. Work on this publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Grant No. 0085-104-14. The analyses and opinions expressed herein do not however necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

fundamental thrust is to equalize the opportunities to choose some other school, not just the "public school around the corner," on the part of all parents, not just the affluent. In arguing for the extension of the voucher to public and private schools, Jencks and his colleagues operate with a very distinctive definition of "public" versus "private."

Their proposal has two underlying principles: (1) no public money should be used to support private schools, and (2) any group that operates a public school should be eligible for public subsidies, even though the "group" in question is not a local public school district. (Areens and Jencks, 1972:52)

The apparent contradiction between the above principles is resolved by divorcing the notion of "public" from the notion of "run by government." Jencks, et al., distinguish between private and public schools not on the basis of "who runs them" but on the basis of "how they are run" (Areens and Jencks, 1972:52). Thus:

"We would then call a school 'public' if it were open to everyone on a non-discriminatory basis, if it charged no tuition, and if it provided full information about itself to anyone interested. Conversely, we would call any school 'private' if it excluded applicants in a discriminatory way, charged tuition, or withheld information about itself.

(Areens and Jencks, 1972:52)

In brief, compliance with eligibility regulations contained in the regulated voucher model, rather than public or private auspices,

establish a school as a "public" school.

### The Regulated Voucher

The plan in brief is as follows: A publicly accountable agency, an "Educational Voucher Agency" or "EVA" would issue a voucher to parents. Parents would take this voucher to any school of their choice which agreed to abide by the rules of the voucher system. Each school would turn its vouchers in for cash.

More specifically, the EVA would be a publicly accountable body with either an elected or appointed governing board. EVAs would replace and perform the functions of local school boards, although nothing in this plan precludes local boards of education from becoming the EVA for the area under their jurisdiction.

All families with elementary school age children would be issued one voucher per child. The value of the voucher would be equal to the per-pupil expenditure of the public schools in the area. Parents could redeem these vouchers in any "approved school."

To be approved for receiving vouchers and then cashing them in, a school would have to minimally meet all existing state requirements regarding curriculum, staffing, and the like, as well as civil and student rights provisions applicable to public, i.e., government run schools. In addition, participating schools would have to accept each voucher as full payment for a child's education -- charging no additional tuition-- accept all applicants and, in cases of oversubscription, fill the first half of its seats by random selection,

and fill the other half in such a way as to not discriminate against racial/ethnic minorities. Moreover, "approved" schools would have to agree to provide full disclosure of information about the receipts and disbursement of voucher revenues on facilities, programs and pupil outcomes.

Under this plan, any school, even if it is run by a private organization, could participate in the voucher program. However, any school would forfeit its participation if it charged tuition above and beyond the voucher. That is, participating schools could not have a hybrid student body with some children attending via a publicly subsidized voucher, and others paying tuition by private means. By the same token, any public, "government-run" school that did not fulfill the stringent public reporting and disclosure provisions would also forfeit its right to participate as a voucher-approved school.

Families under this plan could still choose to purchase private education whose costs exceeded the value of the voucher at schools which chose not to participate in this program. But once having made this decision, such families would forfeit the use of the public subsidy contained in the voucher. They could not, as they could in Friedman's model, apply the voucher towards defraying the cost of tuition.

Finally, the regulated model provides an incentive provision for schools to recruit and retain minorities: "schools which took children from families below average incomes would receive additional incentive payments. These 'compensatory payments' might, for example, make the



maximum payment for the poorest child worth double the basic voucher."  
(Areens and Jencks, 1972:53)

### Rationale

(1) Choice as Empowerment. As was the case with Milton Friedman's model, the problem addressed by the regulated voucher is systematically unequal access among parents to what they see as the best schools for their children. However, Jencks and colleagues argue that "an unregulated voucher system could be the most serious setback for the education of disadvantaged children in the history of the United States." (Areens and Jencks, 1972:54) Nonetheless, Jenck's "liberal" voucher model and Friedman's "conservative" free-market model address similar problems and promise similar benefits.

(2) Choice and Diversity. Compulsory attendance at particular schools introduces strong political forces for homogeneity: "the state, the local board and the school administration have established regulations to ensure that no school will do anything to offend anyone of political consequence." (Areens and Jencks, 1972:50) The competition ensued by a voucher will allow the system to "make room for fundamentally new initiatives that come from the bottom up instead of the top. And only if private initiative is possible will the public sector feel real pressure to make room for kinds of education that are politically awkward but have a substantial constituency." If the private sector is invo

reflecting their special perspectives or their children's needs. This should mean that the public schools will be more willing to do the same thing -- though they will never be able to accommodate all parental preferences. Similarly, if the private sector is involved, educators with new ideas -- or old ideas that are now out of fashion in the public schools -- would also be able to set up their own schools.

(3) Choice and Lower Costs. Friedman argued that one consequence of the monopolistic structure of public schooling is that political pressures to be responsible to a captive but heterogeneous clientele force schools to spend more resources than they need to by providing services to everybody that are only demanded by sub-groups of parents. Jencks, et al., take this argument one step further and defend their proposed inclusion of private schools in the voucher plan by noting that under their proposal "entrepreneurs who thought they could teach children better and more inexpensively than the public schools would have an opportunity to do." (p.51)

(4) Choice and School-Parent Relationships and Support for Public Schools. Choice would promote more democratic accountability. Existing political mechanisms create the situation that schools "by trying to please everyone, end up pleasing no one." (p.51) The same disparities in income and knowledge that restrict education choices among the poor, translate into weak political influence and a lack of effectiveness in using existing mechanisms

to express their educational preferences. Jencks, et al. do agree that the voucher, by allowing more parents without means to vote with their feet, would "result in some shrinkage of the 'public' sector and some growth in the 'private' sector" but then argue that the end result would be to make more schools more truly public:

"If on the other hand, you confine this label 'public' to schools which are equally open to everyone within commuting distance, you discover that the so-called public sector includes relatively few public schools. Instead, racially exclusive suburbs and economically exclusive neighborhoods serve to ration access to good public schools in precisely the same way that admissions committees and tuition charges ration access to good 'private' schools. If you begin to look at the distinction between public and private schooling in these terms, emphasizing accessibility rather than control, you are likely to conclude that a voucher system, far from destroying the public sector, would greatly expand, since it would force large numbers of schools public and private, to open their doors to outsiders." (Aarens and Jencks, 1972:55)

(5) Choice and Equity. The bonus incentive would push "approved voucher" schools to actively recruit and retain low-income students thereby promoting both racial and socioeconomic

integration. Parents' ability to cross residential boundaries would similarly promote racial integration, as would the regulations governing random selection and minority set aside in cases of more applicants than seats to a voucher approved school.

### Implementation and Evaluation Information

This model did receive a test of sorts in several communities in the early to mid-1970s, most notably the Alum Rock school district in San Jose, California. The Alum Rock pilot demonstration project was the culmination of the same United States Office of Economic Opportunity Initiative that commissioned Christopher Jencks and his colleagues at the Center for the Study of Public Policy to develop the model of the regulated voucher. The resulting multi-volume evaluations of the pilot Alum Rock project represent one of the major sources of research evidence on the effects of parent choice. Please see Research Brief No. 3, in Section Four below, and consult references to Bridge and Blackman (1978), Cappell (1981), and Weilor, et al., (1974) in the bibliography in Section Five.

## MODEL THREE:

### PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

#### Basic Reference

The public school of choice model was first and most fully developed in Mario Fantini's Public Schools of Choice: A Plan for the Reform of American Education (1972). All page references in the subsequent discussion are to this work.

#### The Basic Model

Fantini proposes an internal voucher enabling parents to choose the public school within the existing structure that best meets the educational preferences of the family and the learning styles of its children. The proposal is sometimes referred to as an "internal voucher" (p.20); although there is actual vouchering involved, school funds go directly to buildings and do not follow pupils as in the Friedman and Jencks proposals. The basic elements of the Fantini model are as follows:

- (1) Participation is open to all families with school-age children.
- (2) Choice is limited to schools already in the public sector, but not to schools as they are but to schools as they would become if each intentionally diversified its program and approach in response to distinct kinds of parental preferences. Furthermore, the diversification would be a planned process and not an accidental,

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hoped-for outgrowth of competition resulting from the kind of open enrollment provided for in Friedman's model. "The Public Schools of Choice" model would provide the individual parent, student and teacher with direct choice among alternative educational forms -- those now in existence and others yet to be developed -- all within the framework of the public education system." (p.39)

(3) Open access to all: "no public alternative school or program within a school site can practice exclusivity." (p.42)

(4) All schools no matter how distinctive and "alternative" must subscribe to a comprehensive set of common minimum objectives.

(5) Fiscal equality: "each new alternative must be developed and able to operate on a financial level equivalent to the per capita cost of the school district as a whole." (p.43)

### Rationale

Like Friedman and Jencks, Fantini sees more parent choice as a way of empowering the powerless. But being powerless does not simply mean not having the financial means to purchase alternative education in the public sector. Being powerless also means being a permanent minority with respect to having one's educational preferences recognized in a uniform system of schooling. Hence, parent choice within the public sector is a logical and powerful extension of citizen and parent movements for community control of schools. Fantini's plan takes that one step further and provides for family control of education. "Communities" in Fantini's scheme are defined

by shared interests in a particular kind of education. Hence, the need for diversity in order to respond to family differences in what counts as quality education and to respond to differences in learning style is the driving force behind Fantini's call for the expansion of parent choice.

Because of the emphasis on diversity, Fantini is against including private schools in his choice scheme because, at worst, unregulated vouchers would create a two-tier system of education, much like what exists in health care (p.30), and at best the ensuing competition is no guarantee of the kind of diversity needed to make schooling as diverse as the learning styles of children. He argues:

"... the basic problem is really the creation of valid legitimate educational alternatives. In supply and demand terms, we now have high demand but a limited supply. The voucher plan is a proposal which assumes that demand will effect supply. But we have had some experience with similar efforts in other fields. For example, opportunities offered by Medicaid and the GI Bill (new demand) did relatively little to create new or more relevant health and education programs (supply). What did happen was that already existing alternatives were made more available to the consumer."

(pages 27-28)

The "Public Schools of Choice" model, on the other hand, offers the following benefits:

- (1) Choice and Costs. Because lack of alternatives makes

professional educators try to ensure that the "standard educational process" works for all children. Fantini writes: "... Much of their time and talent is consumed in remedial efforts.... Enormous amounts of effort and resources are spent on mounting compensatory efforts" because "standard" services do not suit many students.

(2) Choice and Diversity. The need for diversity is the cornerstone of Fantini's proposal. That proposal builds in planning for intentional diversification as a key element of the plan, and not, as in the Friedman and Jencks models, as a predicted outcome.

(3) Choice and Pupil Achievement. The Friedman and Jencks models were relatively silent on the pupil effects of their respective voucher proposals. Implicitly, assumptions about better services for pupils were made in both proposals, but the causal links were not spelled out. Fantini offers two arguments in favor of why choice through diversity can enhance pupil achievement: (i) a better match between pupil learning style and school teaching style can eliminate many of the causes of school failure; and (ii) the ability to choose increases pupil sense of self-esteem and efficacy and this improves academic achievement. Specifically: "... by actually giving the individual learner (and parent) the right to choose, the educational alternative that he feels is best suited to him, we are providing him with a sense of control over his own destiny. Psychologists are now



revealing that 'fate control' -- the ability of an individual to sense control over his destiny is basic to all motivation and achievement." (p.77)

(4) Choice and Public and Parental Support for Public Schools.

Limiting choice to within the public sector accomplishes the parent empowerment aims of voucher proposals without the attendant political strife. Public alternative schools and programs create natural communities based on shared interest and commitment to the school's distinct program. Public alternative schools and programs, because they are smaller, breed less alienation than homogeneous bureaucratic school systems.

(5) Choice and Equity. The internal voucher or the open enrollment scheme envisioned by Fantini removes the residential basis of segregation. It is more likely than compulsory busing to create integration rather than merely desegregation because alternative schools of choice create a common interest over and above the separation caused by race.

Implementation and Evaluation Data

While no school system has adopted Fantini's model, many school systems in the past decade and a half have developed alternative public school programs. Still others have developed magnet school programs whose guiding philosophy is very much akin to that of Fantini's "Public Schools of Choice" model. Much of what we know about the potential impact of expanding parent choice comes out of

research and evaluation studies of alternative and magnet schools. The major studies that yield research evidence on the claims made by Fantini can be found in Briefs Nos. 1, 6-8, and 10 in Section Four below.

## MODEL FOUR:

### FAMILY CHOICE

#### Primary Reference

The "family choice model" is one of the most far-reaching proposals for choice and is similar to that of Milton Friedman (see Policy Model No. 1, "The Unregulated Voucher," above) but is without the potential inequities of the unregulated voucher identified by Friedman's many critics. The primary reference is: J.E. Coons and S.D. Sugarman, Education By Choice: The Case for Family Control (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1979).

#### Scope of Choice

The "family control" model envisions public subsidies for choice among public schools, across school districts, and between private and public schools, provided that such schools meet certain licensing and certification criteria, among which is full disclosure of financial, pupil outcome and school input data to a public agency whose responsibility would be to collect and disseminate consumer protection information enabling parents to make intelligent choices.

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### Problems to Be Solved By Choice

The first issue is one of equity in school finance. Coons and Sugarman argue that their version of the school voucher (1979:xii):

"provides equal educational resources to all children, regardless of their family's residential mobility, or economic ability to afford private school."

And, they argue (op. cit.) that:

". . . once the state undertakes to provide truly equal educational resources to children of all its residents, any solutions other than a voucher system, in which individual parents and children can exercise a wide range of choice involves serious complications that are difficult to resolve short of full state control of educational decisions."

In addition to, and in an important sense irrespective of the school finance equity considerations raised above, Coons and Sugarman advance another argument based on the centrality of the family's putative right to choose the content of their children's education:

"Family choice for the non-rich could lead to the end of the American double standard: among those who can afford private school, society leaves the goals and means of education to the family; for the rest of society the informing principles are politically determined and implemented through compulsory assignment to a particular public school." (Coons and Sugarman, 1979:2)

### The Family Control Choice Model

Each school-age child would be entitled to a "scholarship certificate" (a voucher) redeemable at any public or private school chosen by the child's family, which meets certain minimum requirements.

Those requirements include state education agency approval and certification that the approved schools:

- Are not patently discriminatory with respect to race and/or sex
- Meet minimum state standards, currently applicable to all public schools, with respect to curriculum and staffing
- Comply with "full disclosure provisions"

The "family-control" model would create a "Federal Trade Commission type" of government agency with information about student outcomes, financial and governance structures, curriculum and teaching style emphasis, and its criteria for successful accomplish of school goals -- information which will be used in government agency sponsored, and not individual school sponsored efforts to package and disseminate information which will enable parents to make more intelligent choices.

Participating schools which meet the above certification/licensing requirements could include public schools, religiously affiliated schools, and other non-affiliated private schools whether they are for-profit or non-profit enterprises.

Participating and certified schools could charge any tuition they chose within a specified range.

Families could choose any one of the participating schools, private or public, including public schools which are in the family's "assigned" attendance area, elsewhere in the school district, and they could choose public schools outside of the district in which they reside.

The subsidy available to families would include the costs of transportation. The size of the subsidy to each family would depend on two factors: (i) the tuition level of the school chosen, and (ii) the family's income. In more detail, the scheme would work as follows (p. 198):

- Every family would have to provide some portion of its private income towards tuition costs. In the case of the poorest family this could be as low as a \$10 a year contribution.
- A poor family would pay \$200 towards tuition at a school of its choosing with a tuition of \$1600. In that case the government would subsidize the remaining \$1400.
- Under the same scheme, a middle income family would pay the initial \$800 for a \$1200 school, with the state picking up the remaining \$400.
- Participating schools, once they have been certified, would not be able to charge tuition above what has been approved and would not be allowed to enroll students whose families were willing to pay for tuition add-ons.

In this respect, Coons and Sugarmans' proposal is closer in spirit to that of the regulated voucher, see Policy Model No. 2 above. In

distancing themselves from Milton Friedman's unregulated voucher proposal they argue that:

". . . the effect of Friedman's proposal is plain. Families unable to add extra dollars [i.e., to the scholarship subsidy as proposed in the Coons and Sugarman model] would patronize those schools which charged no tuition above the voucher, while wealthier families would be able to distribute themselves among the more expensive schools. What is today merely a personal choice, secured entirely with private funds, would become an invidious privilege assisted by government." (Coons and Sugarman, 1979:191)

### Rationale

#### Choice and Equity

First, for reasons summarized above, Coons and Sugarman argue that their plan would equalize family choices by eliminating inequalities due to income and residential mobility.

Second, with respect to the question of how their plan, if implemented, would impact on the question of racial desegregation, Coons and Sugarman offer the following arguments and observations: (i) integration plans which combine choice with compulsion are at least as successful as plans relying on compulsion alone; (ii) the existing evidence suggests that neither "compulsion-only," or "compulsion-with-choice" plans have been totally successful in eliminating all minority schools; and, that furthermore (iii) the

latter situation "is not to be deplored if enrollment is truly voluntary." (Coons and Sugarman, 1979:92)

### Choice and Diversity and School-Parent Relationships

The type of parent choice advanced in the "family control" model would, it is alleged, simultaneously promote diversity and improve school-parent relationships.

Diversity would be promoted because of the inclusion of private schools in the proposed plan. Specifically, only private schools can provide the religious instruction and character education which is highly valued by some parents, but not universally endorsed by all. Moreover, because public schools, in their attempts to be accountable and responsive, are forced to program to the lowest common denominator "private schools offer parents the most viable option to what is officially considered to be an off-beat education." (Coons and Sugarman, 1979:153)

Also, the inclusion of private schools would create the competitive pressure that would lead to more diversity by spurring all schools, including public schools, to be more innovative. Specifically with respect to public schools, Coons and Sugarman (1979:154) argue that "public schools are rarely permitted to die of unpopularity. Thus, their incentive to innovate is meager."

The diversity and choice which could be provided by the implementation of the family-control model would also, it is argued, improve school-parent relationships by eliminating the perennial



source of conflict between family's particularistic educational goals for their children, and public schools' "lowest-common-denominator" drive goals and programs, which, because there have to be designed to appease everyone, end up pleasing no one. More specifically, Coons and Sugarman argue that (1979:101):

"Were a workable system of choice installed, the family without wealth could make its non-majoritarian views heard without resort to the picket line and the street . . . . In having a school that represented their views, those families, for the first time in this century, would acquire access to one of the major forums in which our national identity is delineated."

## MODEL FIVE:

### PEACEFUL USES OF VOUCHER

#### Primary Reference

P.M. Lines, "Peaceful Uses for Tuition Vouchers," Equity and Choice, Volume Two, No. 3, June 1986.

#### Scope of Choice

"Peaceful uses" refers to voucher proposals which are likely to pass muster with the established educational interest groups who have, up to the time of this writing, been unalterably opposed to any hitherto proposed voucher schemes.

With respect to scope, the current policy proposal is unlimited in terms of what schools would participate: participants include public and private schools of every stripe.

With respect to families that would participate, this policy proposal is targeted and limited to families of "sub-populations" of students, i.e., those students who are not well-served by the system as it currently exists. These sub-populations include: initially low-achieving and disadvantaged pupils -- i.e., Chapter 1 eligible students; special needs pupils; at-risk pupils who are potential or

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actual dropouts -- and minorities.

### The Model

In its essentials, Patricia Lines' model is an application of the "regulated voucher model" targeted at the special populations as described above.

Two examples, one actually implemented, the other on the Congressional agenda at the time of the publication of this peaceful uses of vouchers proposal exemplify the approach Lines proposes.

The first is represented in the state of Washington's "Second Chance Program," in which school dropouts are provided with a voucher enabling them to re-enter the schooling system and attend alternative education clinics which can be run by public schools, non-profit private schools, or for-profit private schools.

The second is represented by the United States Department of Education's TEACH (The Equity and Choice Act) bill filed in December 1985. TEACH proposed to convert Chapter 1 grants into vouchers which went directly to the families of Chapter 1 eligible children. The value of the voucher was set at \$600 -- at about the average cost of tuition at a non-elite private elementary school. Recipient families could use this voucher to pick any school of their choice or continue to go to their assigned public school and use the voucher to purchase supplementary after-school services for their children.

## MODEL SIX:

### CONTROLLED CHOICE

#### Primary Reference

National Governors' Association (1986). Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education. Washington: National Governors' Association for Policy Research and Analysis.

#### Scope of Choice

This National Governors' Association (NGA) Task Force proposal discusses the concept of "education dollars following pupils," i.e., the core concept of a voucher, but stops short of using the term voucher. And like Mario Fantini's model, it emphasizes choice within the public schools. But unlike Fantini's public schools of choice plan, the NGA proposal envisions inter-district choice and includes controls on enrollments in order to ensure racial balance.

#### Problem Being Addressed

The opening passages of the NGA Task Force Report states that (NGA, 1986:67)

"We propose an idea in the great American tradition: that you

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can increase excellence by increasing choice"  
and that:

"Our model of compulsory, packaged education, as it now exists, is an enemy of parent involvement and responsibility simply because it allows no choice."

Choice in the NGA proposal is seen as the antidote for eroding public support for public education. Providing parents with choice would strengthen their commitment to the school they chose. When parents are allowed to choose, schools would become more responsive.

### The Model

The NGA proposal for controlled choice is not of a blue-print for any particular scheme. Rather it is a set of principles governing any subsequent initiatives for more parent choice within the public sector. These include the following (NGA, 1986:86-88).

(1) State and locally generated tax funds for education should follow students.

(2) Students should be able to choose any public school within their district or another district, as long as their enrollment in a school does adversely affect racial balance.

(3) High school students should be able to attend accredited public post-secondary degree-granting institutions during their junior and senior years.

(4) State funds will pay for all transportation costs involved in

allowing families the maximum of choice.

(5) State education agencies would provide schools with technical assistance in order to develop distinct programs responding to the parents desire for educational diversity.

(6) State education agencies would develop methods of providing information and counseling to families wishing to transfer their children.

### Rationale

First, allowing parents to have choices would increase their support for public schools.

Second, choice can promote excellence because it allows schools to be different. This provides for that shared sense of mission, among staff and parents, each of whom has chosen that school because of its sense of mission, which the research has found to be a key ingredient of instructionally effective schools.

Third, diversity better serves student needs and reduces school community conflict. Choice allows schools to be different and provides students with different learning environments, environments which correspond to the variety of student learning styles. Choice is also a response "to the challenge . . . that Americans have high, and sometimes contradictory expectations of their schools." (NGA, 1986:69)

### SECTION THREE:

#### THE ISSUES AND THE EVIDENCE

This section addresses the question: what do we really know as a result of hard research and evaluation data, as opposed to anecdote and special pleading, about the actual or potential impact of expanding parent choice?

While ideologues, advocates and philosophical critics of parent choice may argue about the subtleties raised by the question, "Whose kid is this anyway?" the concerns of public school officials lie elsewhere. Their question, repeatedly raised in public testimony, at conferences and symposia, and in the literature representing the viewpoints of school practitioners, is: Would choice help to save/improve or sabotage/overwhelm our system of public schools?

Many of those who argue that choice will help save and improve public schools often rest their case, as we saw in Section Two, on the benefits of competition engendered by expanding opportunities for choice.

Competition, then, is what is most often favored and feared in debate about choice at the level of policy and practice, rather than philosophy.

In one way or another, the seven research summaries below shed light on this issue of competition. For competition to have its potentially beneficial effects, the "consumers," (parents doing the choosing) would have to be more or less eager to shop around and would

have to be reasonably knowledgeable about the intended differences in the products being offered.

Summaries 2 and 3 presented below all collect and digest the available evidence on "consumer" opinions, preferences and behavior.

Summaries 4 through 7 collect the available evidence on "producer" behavior, on all of those good results that choice advocates of all stripes argue would or should occur as a result of expanding parent choice, namely: increased equity, increased diversity and responsiveness to the pluralism of parental preferences, improved pupil achievement and performance, and increased parent and community choice.

The first summary collects what evidence there is for answering the question: what are the additional costs of providing parents with more choice?



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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 1

## CHOICE AND COSTS

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### THE ISSUES

We begin our set of seven research summaries with the topic of costs, because financial considerations are often the first question and the last line of opposition to expanding parent choice on the part of decisionmakers and analysts alike. The issue is compounded because school financing schemes vary so much state by state.

### THE EVIDENCE

Unfortunately, there is much more debate than data on the issue of costs.

(1) Clinchy (1986), in a nationwide telephone survey of 16 school districts that offered some form of parent choice, found that most district managers could not, because of the way schools keep their accounts, disaggregate the extra costs of providing choice. These extra costs were all fractions of administrator and support staff and parent information positions which would have existed anyway. Transportation is of course a key cost but many states pick up a major portion of the tab and the question becomes added

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cost to whom.

(2) The most recent nationwide study of magnet schools (Blank, 1984a) found that per-pupil costs in magnet schools were \$59 higher than in non-magnet schools in the same district. But his cost-differential declined after the first two start-up years although magnets continued to be more expensive because of two factors: (a) transportation, and (b) the contingent fact that magnets tended to have more senior and hence higher salaried teaching staff.

(3) The most recent and comprehensive survey of public alternatives schools, found that in 62 percent of the cases, per pupil costs are equal to or less than in other schools in the same district. (Raywid, 1982)

#### THE INFORMATION BASE

See Research Brief Nos. 2, 3, and 8 in Section Four below. References with information on this issue include Blank, 1984a; Clinchy, 1986; and Raywid, 1982.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 2

DO PARENTS WANT MORE CHOICE?

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### ISSUES

Do parents want more choice? If so, what kinds of parents want more choice?

The latter question is essential in evaluating the equity and empowerment impacts of the various proposals to extend choice described in Section Two above.

### THE INFORMATION BASE

Research clues providing answers to the above questions come from a variety of parent opinion poll data. These include:

- A 1985 Gallup poll survey of 1522 households nationwide (Gallup, 1985)
- NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) data as summarized in Finn, 1985
- Rand Corporation studies of the Alum Rock public school voucher experiment (Weiler, et al., 1974; and Bridge and Blackman, 1978) See Research Brief No. 3 in Section Four below.
- A National Institute of Education nationwide telephone interview

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survey of 1223 parents of public and private school children gathering their reactions to a tuition tax credit proposal. Williams, et al. (1983). See Research Brief No. 4 in Section Four below.

- A telephone interview survey of 476 households in the greater metropolitan area of Minneapolis-St. Paul, gathering family responses to and participation in Minnesota's existing tuition tax credit plan. Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985. See Research Brief No. 4 in Section Four below.
- Telephone interview with 544 Boston parents of public and non-public school children designed to discover how much interest there would be in being able to choose a non-neighborhood school. Citywide Educational Coalition, 1985.
- Interviews with 48 families whose children are just about to be enrolled for the first time in a small Midwest city with some limited choices. Uchitelle, 1978. See Brief No. 11 in Section Four below.

## THE EVIDENCE

### General Conclusion

From the above mixture of national, regional and local school system opinion poll data two general conclusions do emerge: One is "yes," parents do want more choice. And "yes," the poor and minorities especially want more choice and actively exercise that choice when the opportunity arises.

### Who Wants More Choice

The 1985 Gallup Poll found that public support for vouchers has been increasing. Among parents who have children in schools, fully 51 percent support the voucher idea.

Eighty percent of the parents in the Boston survey (CWEC, 1985) indicated that they would consider switching out of their assigned neighborhood school in order to get a "better education." That same study found that low-income whites are the least likely to transfer from their assigned neighborhood schools, while blacks were most likely to express an interest to transfer, to exercise choice.

A similar pattern is revealed in the Gallup Poll data on support for vouchers. Inner city blacks were the strongest supporters of vouchers; 59 percent in favor, as opposed to 51 percent in favor on the part of all parents, and 45 percent on the part of the population in general. Support for vouchers decreased with increasing SES: the least supportive sub-group were college-educated whites.

### Who Would Exercise Choice and Under What Conditions

The general evidence is that given the right kind of support and opportunity low-income minorities would disproportionately exercise choice and hence benefit from it. Here are some clues in support of that conclusion.

- Uchitelle's (1978) study of choice behavior in a system without outreach and parent information systems, found that minorities tended to have lower levels of information about and hence lower

levels of participation in that community's choice plan.

- A similar pattern occurred in the first year of the Alum Rock voucher experiment (Weiler, et al., 1974) but as the system improved its parent information services the gap narrowed and over time blacks were the most likely group to exercise choice and request between school transfers (Bridge and Blackman, 1978).
- Factor analyses of enrollment in private schools by income and race show that as income levels rise blacks are disproportionately more likely to enroll their children in private schools. (Catterall, 1982; Finn, 1985; Gemello and Osmon, 1982).
- The poor, blacks and Hispanics are twice as likely to make use of a tuition tax credit and change where they send their children to school, as is the population at large. (Williams et al., 1983)

### Public and Private Schools

Public opinion poll and survey data show that there are solid patterns of preferences for either public or private schools suggesting deeply entrenched parent interests which are impervious to any of the kinds of public policy initiatives described in Section Two above.

The NIE and Minnesota studies of possible and actual family reactions to a tuition tax credit found that over half of the public

school parents surveyed would not transfer to the private sector under any circumstances. (Williams et al., 1987; and Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985)

The Minnesota study found that the major determinant in choosing private schooling was not a comparative assessment of the choices available among public and private schools, but parents own experience of private education. (Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985)

The Boston study did find that a significant proportion of private school parents would consider going back into the public system if more choices were available. But that sample included a significant proportion of first-time private school users.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 3

## FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE

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### ISSUES

What factors influence how parents make choices? Are there systematic differences in the choices made by different groups of parents as defined by race or socioeconomic status?

Answers to both of these questions affect predictions as to the likely impact of expanding parent choice on promoting educational diversity and equity, in the sense of racial and socioeconomic integration. For example, if parents cluster themselves according to race and income-based preferences for particular brands of education then the diversity made possible by choice could lead to re-segregation.

### THE EVIDENCE

There is evidence that parents of different races and income groups do cluster their preferences for particular kinds of schooling. But this is mitigated by the fact that programmatic criteria are often secondary in importance when parents choose schools.

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### Factors Influencing the Propensity to Choose

(1) Income and Level of Education: In the absence of parent outreach and informational services, low-income and less-educated parents are less likely to avail themselves of choices that exist (Uchitelle, 1978; Wieler, et al., 1974)

(2) Information Services: When school systems do reach out, the gaps in levels of information by income and level of education tend to disappear over time. (Bridge and Blackman, 1978)

### Factors Influencing Choice

Almost all of the studies on this issue -- Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Metz, 1986; Rossell, 1985; Uchitelle, 1978; and Weiler et al., 1974 -- show the prevalence of non-instructional criteria. The aggregate studies of parent choice behavior in magnet schools and in other situations of choice show the following hierarchy of criteria:

- Logistics: school location, closeness to home, facilities considerations
- General quality of education: good teachers, high students, high test scores
- Specific programmatic emphases and themes at the school.

### Longevity of Experience with Choice

One exception to the above general pattern comes from the Boston survey of the level of parental interest in choice (CWEC, 1985). In

that study, general school quality criteria superceded logistics and location in importance.

One possible explanation is that that population has had a long period of experience with busing and magnet education, both of which had weakened the hold of the neighborhood school concept. Support for this inference comes from evaluation data from Alum Rock (Bridge and Blackman, 1978) which showed that over time logistical and general quality considerations became less prominent, and an increasing percentage (though still a minor parents cited distinct school programs as the foremost criteria in making choices.

### Systematic Differences in What Parents Choose

#### (1) Ethnic and Socioeconomic Differences in Curriculum

Preferences. Studies of magnet schools and of the Alum Rock voucher experiment revealed that there are distinct patterns of preferences:

- Higher-educated and upper-income whites favor either child-centered developmental programs or highly competitive school environments.
- Blacks and Hispanics favor traditional move back to basics programs, as do lower income whites. (Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Metz, 1986; Rossell, 1985)

#### (2) Differences Between Public and Private School Parents

(a) With Respect to Demographic Factors: Levels of income drive the propensity to enroll children in private, generally,

except at the uppermost income levels. (Caterrall, 1982; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Gemello and Osmon, 1982).

Controlling for income, inner-city blacks, Catholics, and to a lesser degree, Hispanics enroll in private schools at higher rates than the population at large. (Finn, 1985; Gemello and Osman, 1982)

(b) Comparisons of Choice Behavior Between Private and Public School Parents:

- Private school parents are no more discriminating with respect to their analysis and knowledge of school programs than are public school parents. (Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985)
- The most important factor determining a choice of private schools is whether the parents themselves had attended a private school. (Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Williams, et al., 1983)
- Of those parents who do make choices on the basis of program, private school parents are more likely to cite school climate, moral and religious education factors, while public school parents are more apt to cite something special and distinctive about that school's curriculum. (Finn, 1985; Gemello and Johnson, 1982)
- Catholic school parents are just as likely to cite "educational quality" as they are likely to cite "religious instruction" as a reason for their choice, and in some cities educational considerations outweigh

religious considerations. (CWEC, 1985; Finn, 1985; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Gemello and Johnson, 1982)

#### THE INFORMATION BASE

Please see the following references in Section Five below: Bridge, 1978; Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Catterall, 1982; Citywide Educational Coalition, 1985; Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985; Gemello and Osman, 1982; Finn, 1985; Metz, 1986; Rossell, 1985; Uchitelle, 1978; Weiler, et al., 1974; and Williams, et al., 1983.

For a more in-depth discussion of the research base supporting their conclusions, please see Research Brief Nos. 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11 in Section Four below.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 4

## CHOICE AND EQUITY

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### ISSUES

Does choice promote equity?

This is a rather broad and, as stated, unmanageable question, although proponents and opponents of the various plans for choice often use the term equity or its near synonyms as if their meaning was crystal clear.

Our summary of the research evidence below will be organized around the more manageable and empirically testable questions of:

- Have parent choice plans promoted desegregation?
- Has the introduction of choice led to resegregation either by race or by class?
- Would the expansion of parent choice, including various subsidies for families to choose private education lead to resegregation?
- Does increased choice promote equity in student outcomes and equity in schools' responsiveness to the educational aspirations of the less powerful groups of parents in our society?

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## THE EVIDENCE

### Have Parent Choice Plans Promoted Desegregation?

Based on the most comprehensive and rigorous available studies of magnet schools -- e.g., Blank (1984a); and New York State (1985) -- the answer is "yes." In both studies, the magnet schools were as racially balanced as their district as a whole, and since the inception of the magnet schools the other schools in the "host" districts have improved their racial balance. But, in all cases, magnet school programs were part and parcel of a larger desegregation program with elements of compulsory re-assignment and controlled access to the schools of choice being studied.

### Has the Introduction of Choice Led to Resegregation by Class or Race?

The best available clues to answering this question, come from the Rand Corporation studies of Alum Rock (Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Capell, 1981), and the Public School Alternative Project's nationwide survey of public alternative schools (Raywid, 1982).

The Rand corporation studies of Alum Rock found that:

- At the end of the voucher experiment, all of the schools in the district, including schools which did not participate in the experiment, were more racially balanced than before.
- All of the mini-school programs which provided parents with choices, were as balanced as the district as a whole, with the exception of the multicultural option which attracted a disproportionate number of Hispanic students.

Raywid's study of public alternative schools found that with respect to economic segregation:

- One third of them are mixed rather than single-class schools;
- Almost an equal proportion are distinctly working-class schools;
- A fourth are distinctly middle-class schools.

### Would the Expansion of Choice, Including Subsidies for Private Education, Lead to Resegregation?

The hypothetical expansion in question is a composite of provisions such as those contained in the NGA proposal for controlled choice (see Policy Model No. 6, in Section Two above) which would make every public school in a state-supported system of education a school of choice, tuition tax credits, and some version of regulated and peaceful uses of voucher models as proposed in Policy Model Nos. 2 and 5 in Section 2 above.

Based on the analyses of what is now known about parents' choice behavior as contained in Research Summary No.'s 2 and 3 above, the conclusion is that any currently politically feasible initiatives to expand parent choice through some sort of subsidies for private schooling would have a marginal, and possibly, slightly positive net effect in terms of equity.

This conclusion is based on the following reasoning:

- Parent choices as to whether to enroll in private or public schools are relatively "inelastic" with respect to the various incrementally feasible initiatives to subsidize private choice.

- Based on the evidence now available, provisions such as tuition tax credits, would merely provide a windfall of financial relief to those families who have already and will continue to subscribe to private education.
- At the same time, those same provisions would enable low-income and minority parents to exercise an option hitherto unavailable -- namely to exercise the option of lower-class and black "flight" from educational situations which are deemed unsatisfactory.
- Data from the Boston study (CWEC, 1985) show that expansion of choice in the public, could bring the most recent practitioners of "white" and "middle-class flight" from the public schools.

Final note: the ethical balance is not clear. Whether the windfall available to those whose economic means, and possibly prejudices have enabled and led them, respectively, to choose private education is equal to the increased opportunities for the poor and minorities to do the same, albeit for different reasons, is not a matter that can be settled by research.

### Does Increased Choice Promote Equity in Student Outcomes?

The issue here is: are parents' hopes that their child will do better in schools that they have chosen confirmed by the research. The answer is "yes," or "at least as well." Research providing clues on this is summarized in Research Summary No. 6 below. That summary will focus on what is known about student outcomes in educational



settings provided for in parent choice plans.

Does Choice Make Schools More Responsive to the Educational Preferences of the Least Powerful Parents?

"Least powerful" in this context means not only minorities and low-income parents, but also those who, irrespective of their SES are in the minority with respect to their educational preferences vis-a-vis the prevailing philosophy of the school district in which they reside or the public school to which they are assigned. Research addressing this issue is summarized in Research Summary No. 5 below.

INFORMATION BASE

More analysis of the issues raised in this summary can be found in Research Summary Nos. 2, 3, 5 and 6 below.

Additional back-up and analysis can be found in Research Brief Nos. 2, 3, 7, and 8 in Section Four below.

Citations in Section Five, below, which speak explicitly to the equity issues addressed above include: Blank (1984a); Bridge and Blackman, 1988; Cappell, 1981; Metz, 1986; and New York State (1985).

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 5

## CHOICE, COMPETITION AND DIVERSITY

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### ISSUES

Those who argue that expanding the opportunities for parents to exercise choice would improve schools make several key assumptions about how schools would respond to increased opportunities for choice.

First, parent choice would induce schools to compete for parents, on the assumption that more enrollment is better than less.

Second, this competition would induce schools to differentiate their offerings, thereby providing parents with more options and providing students with a variety of learning settings. This variety corresponds to what learning theory and research has identified as necessary to provide each child with the setting that best meets her/his learning style.

In terms of broad policy issues, these claims can be reduced to the questions of: Does choice lead to diversity? Does more choice lead to competition which would induce schools to provide for more diversity?

In terms of the available research evidence these questions need to be refined into propositions for which, in principle, at least

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FROM: Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, prepared by the Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 0.215, (617) 353-3309. Work on this publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Grant No. 0085-104-14. The analyses and opinions expressed herein do not however necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

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there can be empirical answers. Hence, we will summarize the evidence on whether:

- Parent choice plans are associated with more diversity.
- This diversity is a result of more competition resulting from the existence of parent choice.
- More parent choice would result in more competition leading to more diversity.

## THE EVIDENCE

### Are Parent Choice Plans Associated With More Diversity?

The answer, based on evidence arising from studies of magnet schools (Blank, 1984a; New York State, 1985; Metz, 1986), of the Alum Rock voucher experiments (Bridge and Blackman, 1978), and alternative schools (Raywid, 1982) -- is an unequivocal "yes."

### Is Diversity a Result of the Competition Resulting from the Introduction of Parent Choice?

The answer, based on the research canvassed and briefed in this digest, is "we don't know."

Magnet schools and alternative schools are historically set up to meet an immediate problem -- desegregation, what to do with students who don't fit into the regular program, or how to deal with parents who are too vocal to be ignored but whose preferences don't fit into the mainstream.

The overall trend within magnet school and alternative school

programs and in the Alum Rock voucher experiments has been to increase the number of alternatives. But the evidence indicates that this trend is supply- rather than demand-driven: new options are opened up in response to staff interest rather than any measures or monitoring of consumer demand. The Rand Corporation evaluators of the Alum Rock voucher experiment found evidence of tacit staff strategies to restrict competition: optional programs that were at full or near full enrollment were not marketed as aggressively as less popular programs.

Metz's (1986) study of magnet school programs found that where school district authorities were sensitive to competition and did monitor consumer demand in the form of enrollment data and waiting list information, their response led to less diversity. The least popular of the schools in the study had the most distinctive program and was loyally supported by a core of parents. But that core was not enough to keep the school viable as a magnet that could help the district as a whole improve its racial balance. The result was that this particular school was pressured to homogenize its program in the direction of the most popular magnet school in the study district, a school which had the least distinctive program.

#### Would More Competition Provide for More Diversity?

Metz's (1986) finding that competition may, under certain conditions, reduce rather than increase diversity raises some serious issues about whether competition either among public schools, or between public and private schools will have the salutary effect of

inducing public schools to become more responsive, creative or entrepreneurial. On this issue two strands of research offer some useful clues.

Chubb and Moe's (1985) comparison of the instructional effectiveness, program offerings and governance and environmental context of private vs. public schools, found that private schools were able to offer more diversity, i.e., more distinctive programs, than public schools.

One explanation lay with the fact of parent choice. Since private schools were chosen, they could more accurately reflect the preferences of their voluntary consumers rather than trying to achieve a lowest common denominator addressing the contradictory preferences of a diverse and captive clientele.

Another explanation lay with the fact that, in an important sense, private schools could also chose their parents. And, in general, private schools had a more peaceful environment, on characterized by less accountability to external authorities and less susceptibility to contradictory outside influences which can interfere with the development of a distinct program.

An additional clues as to what conditions can promote diversity is found in Blank's (1984) and New York State's (1985) studies of magnet schools. Both studies found that the most instructionally effective magnet schools also had the most distinct and clear-cut program emphases and school missions. And, that in each case this was associated with special dispensations from district-wide procedures

and norms providing these schools with the greater building level autonomy and a more "peaceful" environment, characteristic of private schools.

#### THE INFORMATION BASE

Please see the following references in Section Five, below: Blank, 1984a; Chubb and Moe, 1985; Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Metz, 1986; New York State, 1985; Raywid, 1982.

More detailed research findings supporting the summary and analysis offered above can be found in Research Brief Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in Section Four below.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 6

## CHOICE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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### ISSUES

Does choice lead to school improvement? This rather broad question comprises a series of more discrete and manageable questions which organize our summary of the research evidence.

- How do schools of choice compare with other schools in terms of student outcomes?
- Do schools of choice provide for equity in student achievement? That is, do they provide environments in which traditionally under-achieving students do well?
- Does choice create the conditions that the research has identified as being associated with instructional effectiveness?

### THE EVIDENCE

#### Choice and Student Outcomes

(1) Academic Achievement. Magnet schools had higher math and reading test scores than their district averages. (Blank, 1986; New York State, 1985)

The academic performance of schools as a whole improved after

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they became magnet schools, even in those cases where the pupil population changed to include more minority and low-income students (New York State, 1984).

Evaluation data from the Alum Rock voucher experiment showed that students of parents who exercised choice performed no differently than the rest of the student population (Cappell, 1981).

Pupils in alternative school achieved higher grade point averages, higher SAT scores and higher levels of reading and math achievement. (Smith, 1978)

(2) Other Student Outcomes. Alternative schools have reduced discipline problems, lower drop-out rates, and higher student attendance than regular schools serving comparable students (Smith, 1978).

Magnet schools experienced significantly higher student attendance rates, fewer behavioral problems and lower suspension rates than comparable non-magnet schools. (Blank, 1984a) Three quarters of the magnet schools in the New York study had drop-out rates below the district average (New York State, 1985).

#### Choice and Equity in Student Achievement

While the difference is slight, blacks and Hispanics who are in Catholic High Schools enjoy higher academic achievement than their demographical comparable (i.e., similar place of residence, and family level of income and educational attainment) peers. (Coleman, et al., 1982; Keith and Page, 1985)



Stronger evidence of equity gains in achievement come from magnet school studies.

The New York State study found that average levels of achievement in magnet schools with high minority enrollment were equal to other schools in that same district who had low levels of minority involvement. (New York State, 1985)

### Choice and the Conditions for School Effectiveness

Two conditions for effectiveness -- strong identity and sense of school mission and strong instructional leadership -- are more likely to be found in schools of choice.

Chubb and Moe's (1985) comparison of public and private schools found that the latter were more likely to have a strong and distinct sense of mission and the conditions and role orientation, on the part of both staff and principals, conducive to the principals' exercise of instructional leadership.

Raywid (1982) and Smith (1978) found that public alternative schools were more likely than their counterparts to be able to articulate and communicate a distinct mission and philosophy.

Blank's (1984a) and the New York State (1985) study of magnet schools similarly found that those schools were able to articulate, implement -- in terms of concrete daily practices -- and project a distinct sense of mission. Most significantly, Blank (1984a) found that those magnet schools which showed the highest student achievement gains had the more distinct mission and were characterized by being somewhat exempt from certain districtwide requirements, an exemption

which allowed the schools to be programmatically innovative, and their principals to have more of the discretion characteristic of that enjoyed by the private school principals studied by Chubb and Moe (1985).

#### THE INFORMATION BASE

Please consult the following references in Section Five below:

Blank, 1984a; Cappell, 1981; Chubb and Moe, 1985; Coleman, et al., 1982; Keith and Page, 1985; New York State, 1985; Raywid, 1982; and Smith, 1978.

For a more in-depth discussion of the evidence supporting the summary conclusions offered above, please consult Research Brief Nos. 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 10, in Section Four below.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NO. 7

## CHOICE AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

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### THE ISSUE

Many supporters for expansion of parent choice within the public sector argue that it is a necessary step to revitalize public education by (a) making public schools more responsive to the public they serve (because as a result of choice they can no longer count on a captive clientele), and (b) restoring public support and increasing public subscriptions for public education, because through choice, there is less of an incentive to escape into private education.

This coupling of the responsiveness and support argument is most prominent in the National Governors' Association's (NGA, 1986, see Policy Model 6, in Section Two above) proposal. It is equally prominent in Fantini's (1972) call for "public schools of choice" (Policy Model 3, in Section Two above).

The responsiveness argument is also at least implicit proposals for choice which includes public subsidies for family's purchase of private education. A notable example is the "regulated voucher" proposal in Policy Model 2, in Section Two above. The latter is designed to make public schools more responsive as a result of the

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competition that would be engendered by the regulated voucher plan. It is also, moreover, designed to make participating private schools more responsible.

## THE EVIDENCE

### Does Choice Lead to Increased Public Support for Public Schools

#### Introduction

The evidence does not support the more ambitious claims of either the opponents or proponents of choice.

### Would Expanded Choice in the Public Sector Lead to Less White or Middle-Class Flight to Private Schools?

There is anecdotal evidence that the longer than expected waiting lists for magnet schools in some school districts indicate that students are being drawn from families who have hitherto been enrolling their children in private, especially Catholic parochial schools (Clinchy, 1986). But there is no published quantitative evidence to confirm this phenomenon.

Another site-specific and non-generalizable, yet still interesting clue comes from the Boston survey of parent choice behaviors (Citywide Educational Coalition, 1988). That study found that given the opportunity to pick a "high quality" public school anywhere in the district, many private school parents would "very seriously" consider transferring back into the public sector.

### Would Expansion of Parent Choice Through Subsidies for Private Education Lead to the Wholesale Abandonment and "Ghetto-ization" of

### Public Schools?

The evidence considered in Research Summary Nos. 2 and 3 above, on patterns of parent choice suggest that the answer is "no."

Parents' consumer preferences for private versus public education are inelastic with respect to any currently feasible level of subsidy and are fixed -- they are based on matters of taste for public vs. private education per se, on biography, parents' own history of private education -- and not on discriminating, rational consumer type shopping around for the best schools behavior.

Because of this inelasticity the net effect of various proposals to subsidize private school choices, would be an income transfer to those families who have already decided and will continue to enroll their children in private schools, and not an incentive for more white and middle-class flight from public schools.

There is some elasticity on the part of blacks and Hispanics, especially those living in large cities. These two groups would be most likely to take advantage of even modest subsidies for private schooling. Hence, a marginal effect might be a slight decrease in the "ghetto-ization" of inner-city public schools.

### Are Parents in Public Schools of Choice More Supportive of the Schools?

The only measures of support available in the research canvassed are: knowledge of the school's mission, and positive attitudes towards the public schools in general.

The answer on this question is positive.

Studies of magnet schools and public alternative schools show that their parent subscribers were more likely to correctly identify the school's mission and programs, than parents in general (Blank, 1984a; New York State, 1985; Raywid, 1982; and Smith, 1978).

Evaluations of the Alum Rock public school voucher experiments show that voucher parents were more positive about the public schools, than non-voucher in that same district, and parents in general, as revealed in national opinion poll data. (Bridge and Blackman, 1976; Weller, et al., 1974)

#### Responsiveness: Is Choice Associated With Greater Parent Involvement in School Decisionmaking?

None of the studies canvassed in this digest addressed this question directly. Nonetheless, there are some clues, albeit ambiguous.

Blank's (1984) study of parent and community involvement in magnet schools that in general:

(a) magnet schools had comparatively higher levels of parent involvement.

(b) levels of involvement were positively correlated with levels of parent satisfaction, and with subjective and objective measures of higher school quality.

(c) higher levels of parent and community involvement in the magnet schools once they were established are associated with:

(i) higher levels of parent involvement in the process of planning and designing those magnet schools, and

(ii) that, furthermore, these higher levels of involvement in the planning process were the result of aggressive outreach on the part of school districts with a prior history of welcoming parent involvement in decisionmaking.

The findings from Black's (1984) national study are ambiguous. It is not clear whether the higher levels of parent involvement are a result of choice or of pre-existing practices, practices which allowed parents to have a voice in the design of the choices that would become available.

Additional ambiguity is introduced by Chubb and Moe's (1985) comparison of public and private schools. While parents in private schools felt more efficacy with respect to how the school would respond to them, principals and school leaders were less likely (than their public school counterparts) to cite parents as an "outside authority" group whose influence had to be taken into account. Moreover, private schools were found to have fewer formal channels for parents to register either their individual grievances or their general policy preferences.

An intriguing clue about the dynamic effects of parent choice on parent involvement and schools responsiveness comes from the Rand Corporation evaluation study of the Alum Rock public school voucher experiment. (Weiler, et al., 1974, Bridge and Blackman, 1978) The Rand Corporation researchers found that:

(i) voucher parents were more likely than non-voucher parents (and much more likely in national samples of parents in general) to feel

that they should have a voice in school decisionmaking including decisions about program and staffing, and

(ii) that, furthermore, this attitude was reinforced by the experience of choice: follow-up surveys showed that the longer the parents were involved in the voucher, the more strongly they felt about their right to have a voice in such decisions, even though in objective terms further extensions of parent choice in Alum Rock were not accompanied by any increased opportunities to exercise parent voice in that system's decisionmaking.

#### THE INFORMATION BASE

Research Summary Nos. 2 and 3 above contain analyses supporting the general conclusions drawn above.

Additional analyses of the evidence can be found in Research Brief Nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 10 in Section Four below.

References to the studies mentioned in this summary, listed in Section Five below include: Blank, 1984a; Blank, 1984b; Bridge and Blackman, 1978; Chubb and Moe, 1985; Clinchy, 1986; Citywide Educational Coalition, 198 ; New York State, 1985; Raywid, 1982; Smith, 1978; and Weiler, et al., 1974.



## SECTION FOUR:

### THE RESEARCH BASE

The eleven research briefs which follow provide succinct summaries of the 14 major research and evaluation studies that provide the hard evidence used in the topical summaries presented in section three, above.

The briefs are organized alphabetically by author's last name in order to facilitate cross-referencing between the contents of this section and the topical summaries in Section Two. The 24 major studies briefed below come from several distinct clusters of research. These include the following:

- Evaluation and research studies on magnet schools. Please see Brief Nos. 1-2, 6-7, 9 and 11.
- Evaluations of the Alum Rock voucher experiments. Please see Brief No. 3.
- Studies of alternative public school programs. Please see Brief Nos. 8 and 10.
- Studies of quantitative projections of the possible impact of various proposed or hypothetical tuition tax credit schemes which provide clues towards answering the question: would public subsidies allowing more parents to exercise choice in the private sector lead to a wholesale abandonment of public schools? Please see Brief No. 4.
- Studies which draw relevant comparisons between the private

and the public school settings, providing clues for answering the question of whether public schools under their present governance structure will be able to respond positively as entrepreneurs to the increased competition resulting from any expansion of parent choice, whether or not it involves the private sector. Please see Brief No. 1.

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BRIEF NO. 1

PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MAGNET SCHOOLS

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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BLANK, R.K. (1984) "Community Participation in Urban Public Schools: Analyzing Effects of Magnet School Programs." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans. ED 247 358

This report is an excerpt of a larger study of 45 magnet schools in 15 urban school districts and focuses on the questions: Do magnet schools increase community participation in public education? and, what factors lead to increased participation?

The findings are as follows:

- Almost half of the magnets studied had higher levels of community participation than other schools in their district.
- Magnet schools were especially effective in increasing business and non-profit organization involvement with the schools.
- High levels of involvement on the part of all three sectors of the community -- parents, businesses, and non-profit organizations -- were related to the extent of prior participation in the planning and creation of the magnets but

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were unrelated to type and theme of the magnet and to its location (minority versus non-minority neighborhood).

- Magnets which had the highest levels of involvement also enjoyed the highest ratings of educational quality as perceived by community respondents to satisfaction surveys.

The major policy implications of these findings are two-fold: first, there is a relationship between community involvement and community support for and satisfaction with public schools. But, second, high levels of involvement are not the automatic by-product of a magnet program, but the result of school system outreach to and involvement with parents in the design and planning of the magnet school program.

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BRIEF NO. 2

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

MAGNET SCHOOLS

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, EQUITY, COSTS

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BLANK, R.K. (1984) "The Effects of Magnet Schools on the Quality of Education in Urban School Districts" Phi Delta Kappan (December)

This article presents a summary of the key findings of the only nationwide study of magnets designed to investigate their impact on school improvement as well as on desegregation.\* That study's findings with respect to the impact of the choice available through magnet education have been presented in Brief No. 1, above. This brief will summarize the studies findings with respect to equity, desegregation and school improvement.

The findings are based on a sample of 45 schools, 30 elementary and 15 secondary, in 15 school districts representative of the 138 urban school districts which in 1982-83 were operating magnet

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\*Rolf Blank, et al. Survey of Magnet Schools: Analyzing a Model For Quality Integrated Education. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Education by James H. Lowry and Associates, September 1983, Contract No. 300-81-0420.

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programs. The database consisted of comparison of locally available data on pupil outcomes, desegregation outcomes, and on site interviews and observations. Conclusions were drawn on the basis of historical comparisons, before and after the introduction of the magnet programs, and by cross-sectional comparisons of magnet school outcomes versus districtwide averages. One final note: the study's sample did include 14 (out of 45) schools which use selective means of enrolling students -- i.e., achievement test scores, or grade point averages. But the effect of this selectivity was controlled for the study's findings and conclusions.

### Magnet Schools and Equity

(1) Two-thirds of the districts in the sample established magnets with the express intent of advancing desegregation. In 48 percent of those cases, magnet programs has resulted in desegregation.

(2) Two-thirds of the schools studied achieved racial balance, i.e., a mix comparable to the districtwide proportions of students of different races.

(3) Magnet schools which had higher educational quality, as measured by pupil outcomes, input measures, and parent and staff ratings, also were more advanced in terms of in-school racial integration.

### School Improvement

(1) Pupil Achievement: Eighty percent of the sample schools had

math and reading achievement test scores above their district averages. Forty percent produced average test scores that were significantly higher (by 10 or more points) than their district averages. Twenty percent (including the selective magnets) had averages 30 points higher.

(2) Other Pupil Outcomes: Magnet schools produced significantly higher student attendance rates fewer behavioral problems, and lower suspension and drop-out rates than comparable non-magnet schools.

### Magnet Schools and Costs

Average per pupil costs in magnet schools were \$59 higher than in non-magnets in the same districts.

Magnet secondary schools were more "expensive" than elementary schools.

Per pupil costs for all magnet schools, however, declined after the first two start-up years. Transportation and higher teacher salaries (because magnets tended to have more experienced teachers) accounted for the cost differences.

### Magnet Schools and Diversity

Most of the schools in the study did have a distinct theme. Those which had the most coherent theme and curriculum, and correspondingly distinct teaching methods, also showed greater pupil achievement gains.

The kind of theme was unrelated to achievement, what made a difference was the distinctiveness of the program. Such distinctiveness was achieved when schools were allowed to depart from districtwide rules and convention, especially in the areas of staff selection. Generally, principals in the more distinct and instructionally effective magnet schools had more discretion in staff selection.



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BRIEF NO. 3

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

VOUCHERS, ALUM ROCK

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE, EQUITY, SCHOOL  
IMPROVEMENT, DIVERSITY AND COMPETITION,  
SCHOOL-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS

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BRIDGE, R.G., and BLACKMAN, J. (1978). A Study of Alternatives in American Education, Volume IV: Family Choice in Schooling.\* Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation. Report No. R-2170/4 - NIE. ED 206 058

CAPPELL, F.J. (1981). A Study of Alternatives in American Education. Volume VI: Student Outcomes in Alum Rock. Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation. Report No. R-2170/6 - NIE. ED 216 426

RASMUSSEN, R. (1981). A Study of Alternatives in American Education. Volume III: Teachers' Responses to Alternatives. Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation. Report No. R-2170/3 - NIE.

\* A brief and accessible summary of the implications of this report can be found in R.G. Bridge, "Information Imperfections: The Achilles Heel of Entitlement Programs." School Review (May 1978).

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THOMAS, M. (1978). A Study of Alternatives in American Education.  
Volume II: The Role of the Principal. Santa Monica, California:  
Rand Corporation. Report No. R-2170/2 - NIE.

WIELER, D. et al. (1974). A Public School Voucher Demonstration: The  
First Year at Alum Rock. Santa Monica, California. Report No.  
1495-NIE. ED 093 091

## BACKGROUND

The preceeding five studies represent the primary data base for assessing the impact of the only publicly financed effort to implement certain aspects of a voucher plan as envisioned in Policy Model No. 2 in Section Three above; the regulated voucher model as presented in Jencks et al. (1970).

As critics, commentators, and consistent advocates of the voucher idea are quick to point out, the five-year demonstration project at the California independent school district of Alum Rock -- a racially heterogeneous, predominantly middle- to lower-class, urban area in and around San Jose -- was not a true test of the regulated voucher model. Actual practice deviated from the model in several crucial aspects:

- (i) Private school options were not available;
- (ii) There was no independent Education Voucher Agency and education dollars did not follow pupils in any direct sense.
- (iii) Pupil enrollment was not the only or most important source of revenue for the participating schools; schools were thus cushioned against the competitive pressures envisioned in the regulated voucher

model.

(iv) Not all schools in the district participated in the demonstration. At its height only 14 out of the district's 24 schools participated in the demonstration project.

Nonetheless, the 14 participating schools offered 51 optional mini-school (alternatives within schools) programs. Thus, irrespective of whether Alum Rock was a real voucher program or not, it does represent an important laboratory of what one observer has characterized as "an open enrollment program with alternative public schools" (Finn, 1985:19) for gauging the impact of expanded opportunities for parent choice.

#### THE EVIDENCE

The secondary literature on Alum Rock is voluminous. Much of it consists of post-mortems and "I-told-you-so" analysis on the part of ardent advocates and opponents of vouchers. The intellectual mapping and history of this secondary literature is beyond the scope and purpose of this digest. Similarly, the data provided by the five-year multi-volume Rand Corporation evaluation is extremely rich and detailed. This brief, consistent with the purposes of this digest, only offers the highlights of this rich data base, highlights which draw general conclusions relevant to the policy issues addressed in Section Three, above, namely: the impact of choice on equity, on school improvement, on diversity and competition and on parent-school relations.

In the interests of economy of presentation, this brief will not offer detailed summaries of the data base, research foci, and methodologies of each of the reports referenced above. In terms of the summary presented below, conclusions about the factors influencing parent choice, and of the impact of choice on parent-school relations come from Bridge and Blackman (1978) and Weiler (1979). Conclusions about the impact of choice in Alum Rock on student outcomes, i.e. school improvement, come from Cappell (1981). Conclusions about the impact of choice on diversity and competition come from Rasmussen (1981), Thomas (1978) and Weiler (1974). Conclusions about the equity implications of choice -- in terms of parental access to options, desegregation and student outcomes -- come from Bridge and Blackman (1978); Cappell (1981) and Weiler (1974).

### Who Exercised Choice

There were race and class differences in levels of awareness about the choices available. Whites had the highest levels; Hispanics had the lowest levels of awareness; Blacks were in between.

Awareness also varies by socioeconomic status. Twenty-six percent of non-high school graduates did not know about the choices available. Among high school graduates, only seven percent were unaware. Over time, this initial disparity in levels of awareness evened out, although non-native-English-speaking Mexican Americans continued to have lower levels of awareness.

Level of education also influenced how parents received

information: the better educated relied on printed materials and on visiting the schools and shopping around in true rational consumer fashion. The less well-educated relied on word of mouth from their peers or on contacts with a trusted teacher.

Over the course of the three to four year experiment, all demographic groups exercised choice, i.e., transferred from program to program, at roughly the same rates. Most transfers were between options within the same school. Blacks, however, were more likely than any other group to transfer from school to school.

### Factors Influencing Choice

Non-instructional criteria were the most prevalent factors used by parents. In fact, even those who transferred out of their originally assigned school cited location -- closer to home, nicer building -- as a key factor. Over time, however, the importance of this factor went down from a high of 81 percent in the first year to 62 percent.

Initially, blacks, Hispanics and the well-educated whites who made choices on educational criteria wanted more diverse programs, i.e. alternative programs, than the parents in Alum Rock as a whole. However, in terms of the mix of students in the optional programs, there were no discernible class or ethnic differences in the earliest years of the program. At that same time, however, almost 50 percent of the parents could not identify which of the 51 optional programs their child was in.

Over time, both the rate of transfers and parental awareness

increased and there emerged some distinct clusters of preferences by class and race: well-educated whites favored the more open, developmental and child-centered programs; blacks and Hispanics favored basic traditional curricula. (The same clustering was also found by researchers of magnet schools: Metz, 1986 and Rossell, 1985).

### Choice and Equity

The Alum Rock school district's racial balance was slightly better after the experiment than before, although the district did not in the early-to-mid 1970's have a severe segregation problem.

Enrollment within the optional mini-school programs was also as racially balanced as any school in the district, with the exception of the option that had a multicultural theme which attracted a disproportionate share of Hispanics.

### Choice, Diversity and Competition

Alum Rock did offer diversity. The spectrum of options did reflect the kinds of programs identified as wishes on parent surveys. The 51 programs contained as much diversity as was found in any subsequent studies or surveys of magnet schools (Blank, 1984a; New York State, 1985) and alternative schools (Raywid, 1982).

But this was a supply-driven rather than a demand-driven diversity. The initiative came primarily from teachers and not from any response to enrollment figures or parent suggestions. Competitive pressures were non-existent because: (i) students were

"grandfathered," meaning they did not have to choose but could stay in their previously assigned school; (ii) staff and schools were similarly protected -- at best, under-enrollment meant some inside-the-school reassignment; and (iii) as noted previously, most parents exercised choice within options at the same school, and not among schools.

Moreover, the Rand researchers found evidence of staff strategies to restrict competition: programs that were at peak enrollment were not marketed as aggressively as low-enrollment programs. This was not surprising since competitive success only brought problems -- overcrowding, materials and supply shortages -- without any corresponding rewards to the staff at the school site who had to deal with the immediate effects of success.

#### School Improvement: Choice and Student Outcomes

Because of record keeping problems, the Rand researches could not gauge any differences in school attendance, discipline problems, etc., between voucher and non-voucher students.

When it became possible to compare student achievement, students of parents who exercised choice performed no differently than the rest of the student population.

#### Choice and School-Parent Relationships

The Rand researchers did find an interesting effect of being able to choose on parent attitudes towards the schools and towards parent

involvement in the schools. Whether the impact of that effect would have led to more parent-school conflict or cooperation and support would depend on school practices other than just the provision of choice.

Quite simply, parents who exercised choice were more likely to be supportive of schools; more likely to favor greater involvement in school decisionmaking, including staff selection; and, the longer the parent had been exercising choice, the more strongly she or he felt about the legitimacy of parent involvement in school decisionmaking, even though objectively the scope for such involvement did not increase as the voucher experiment grew.



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BRIEF NO. 4

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE

TUITION TAX CREDITS

CHOICE AND EQUITY

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE

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CATTERALL, J.S. (1982). Tuition Tax Credits: Issues of Equity.

Stanford University, School of Education. ED 228 701

DARLING-HAMMOND, L., and KIRBY, S.N. (1985). Tuition Tax Deductions and Parent School Choice: A Case Study of Minnesota. Rand Corporation, R-3294-NIE.

GEMELLO, J.J. and OSMAN, J.W. (1982). "Factors Influencing Choice: Estimating the Enrollment Shift." IFG Policy Perspectives, Winter.

JACOBS, M.J. (1980). "An Update: Who Would Benefit From Tuition Tax Credits?" Phi Delta Kappan (June).

WILLIAMS, M.F., HANCHER, K.S., and HUTNER, A. (1983). Parents and School Choice: A Household Survey. School Finance Project Working Paper, United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. ED 240 739

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FROM: Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research, prepared by the Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, (617) 353-3309. Work on this publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Grant No. 0085-104-14. The analyses and opinions expressed herein do not however necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

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All five of these studies attempt to project and in one instance actually gauge how many parents and what kinds of parents would most likely exercise choice and migrate to private schools at varying levels of public subsidies as represented by various tuition tax credit proposals prevalent in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As such, their findings can shed light on three issues of concern in this digest:

- What factors influence parents' choices, and what is the role played by financial considerations?
- Would public subsidies, like tuition tax credits, empower the poor and minorities and bring about more equity in the opportunities to exercise choice?
- Would public subsidies for families to purchase private education lead to an abandonment of the public schools?

The findings are inconclusive and contradictory. Jacobs (1980) in a report on a Congressional study of patterns of private school enrollment and the likely impact that a tuition tax credit would have on those patterns. It found that: (1) private school enrollment is highest among upper-income whites in the Northeast region of the United States; and (2) that tuition tax credits would most likely benefit this segment of the population more than others.

Catterall (1982) provides a similar analysis using census data to project who would benefit from a tuition tax credit plan, based on 1979 patterns of private school enrollment. The projection analyzes the potential beneficiaries in terms of factors normally associated

with equity considerations: income, race, sex, place of residence/community type, and educational need. Catterall's conclusion that "the beneficiaries of a tuition tax credit plan would differ from the general population of pupil families in variety of ways" (p. 1), is based on the following findings:

- (1) Income: About two-thirds of the benefits of a plan that credit one-half of a school's tuition up to a \$500 limit would accrue to families with incomes over \$20,000 per year, while only one-fifth of the benefits would extend to families having annual incomes of \$15,000 or less.
- (2) Race: White families would receive disproportionately larger shares of tuition tax credit benefits. Blacks would be under-represented in the total set of beneficiaries. Hispanic families would receive a proportional benefit from tuition tax credits.
- (3) Place of Residence: Region: A disproportionate number of families in the Northeast and north Midwest regions would benefit.
- (4) Place of Residence: Community Type: Tuition tax credit benefits would be concentrated in central cities where high proportions of children attend private schools, and would be negligible in rural areas which have few private schools.
- (5) Need: Since special needs students are disproportionately under-represented in private schools, this group would not "share fairly in tuition tax credit benefits." (p. 18)

It is important to keep in mind that the criterion of

"proportional benefit" and "fair shares" invoked in Catterall's conclusion are based solely on an analysis of existing patterns of private school enrollment. Although he acknowledges that the introduction of tuition tax credits may cause "behavioral changes," i.e., more families and more different kinds of families would enroll in private schools, his projections do not estimate the possible magnitude or equity impact of those changes.

Gemello and Osmon (1982) conducted a factor analysis on census data on private school enrollment patterns in order to try to estimate the changes that would be introduced under the same kind of tuition tax credit plan as was examined by Catterall. Their conclusion is that the changes would be almost negligible, tuition tax credits would not promote a stampede away from the public schools. This conclusion was reached by treating the tax credit as an addition to a family's income and then analyzing the independent effect of family income as one of many factors influencing the decision to exercise choice in the private sector.

Other factors analyzed by Gemello and Osmon (1982) included such family variables as race, place of residence, and religious preference, and school system variables such as pupil racial/ethnic composition, and school quality as measured by levels of school expenditure and test scores. Their factor analysis did yield additional findings that are relevant to the policy issues discussed in this digest. Specifically, Gemello and Osmon (1982) found that:

- (1) Religious feeling is a stronger force than family income in

terms of choosing private education.

(2) Private school attendance among all income groups is higher in school districts with large minority populations.

(3) Private school attendance, particularly in parochial schools, is much lower across all segments of the parent population, where school quality, as reflected in levels of expenditure and test scores, is higher.

The study by Williams et al. (1983) undertook a more direct approach to investigating who would benefit and what would be the impact of a tuition tax credit. It interviewed a national sample of 1,223 households with children in grades 11-12. Of those interviewed, 88 percent had children in public schools, the rest in private schools. The findings and conclusions are as follows:

(1) Parents currently choosing to send their child to private schools tend to be better educated and more affluent, to live in cities, to be Catholic, and to have attended a private school themselves.

(2) Different types of private schools are chosen for different reasons:

- independent schools are chosen for academic reasons
- non-Catholic religious schools are chosen solely for religious reasons
- Catholic schools are chosen for both religious and academic reasons

(3) Among public school parents, 23.5 percent indicated that they

would be "somewhat likely" to take advantage of a tuition tax credit, nine percent would be "very likely" to do so; 55 percent would stay in public schools regardless of the option to exercise a tuition tax credit.

(4) Two groups of public school parents were more likely to take advantage of a tuition tax credit: non-white and lower SES parents who were dissatisfied with their schools and parents who had prior interest in and knowledge about private schools.

(5) Although the shift to private schools would not be great, it would result in greater representation of lower status and minority children in private schools.

A quite different assessment of the actual impact of Minnesota's state tax credit for school tuition emerged from the Darling-Hammond and Kirby (1985) telephone survey of 476 households in the seven county areas surrounding and including Minneapolis-St. Paul. That study found that:

(1) Ninety-eight percent of the families sending their children to private schools would have done so anyway.

(2) Ten percent of that same sub-sample cited the deduction as a very important consideration.

(3) Among public school parents, 23 percent indicated that once having the deduction explained to them, they would be likely to consider switching to private schools, while 50 percent indicated that they would not switch in any case. (Note the similarity to survey responses to the national survey conducted by Williams et al., 1983.)

This Minnesota study also analyzed parents' choice-making behavior and found the following:

- (1) Knowledge of Choice: Those parents who knew about the tax credit provision were more likely to be consumers of private education, to be higher income and better educated.
- (2) Propensity to Exercise Choice: 62 percent of public school parents were "active choosers" as compared to 53 percent of the private school parents. "Active choice" means shopping around before deciding on a school. One way that public parents can shop around is by considering school quality as a factor in choosing a place of residence. Level of education was the most important factor in parents' propensity to shop around: the higher the level, the higher the propensity.
- (3) Parental Preferences and Factors Influencing Choice:
  - (a) Parents Income and Education: These factors did determine the extent to which private schools were searched and chosen. The higher the level of income and education the more likely were parents to choose private schools. But at the very top of the income scale the propoensity to search for private schools was less. The studies' authors hypothesize that these parents had already made a choice of residence enabling them to have access to what they perceived to be high quality public schools.
  - (b) Preferences and School Quality Factors: One surprising finding is that private school consumers were less discerning than

public school consumers. As this study notes:  
"This finding brings into question the assumption that the selection of a private school is generally the result of comparing schools and choosing the most competitive options. Just as many public school parents automatically send their child to the nearest public school, a large number of private school parents -- especially those who attended private school themselves -- seemingly 'automatically' send their child to a particular private school." (Darling-Hammond and Kirby, 1985:14)

Neither the sample nor the survey items permitted this study to draw any conclusions about the demographic correlates of different preferences for different kinds of education, other than the clear "taste" for private education among parents who themselves had gone to private schools.

Among what this study called the "active choosers," those who shopped around before enrolling their child in a school, there were differences between public and private school parents. Both sets cited school quality, especially the quality of the teaching staff and high academic standards as the most important criteria. But public school parents cited the kinds of courses offered as next in line of importance, while private school parents cited moral values and religious instruction ahead of course offerings. An equal number of public and private school parents cited the "socioeconomic background



of students" as an important factor.

There is some support in this study, therefore, for the proposition that parent choice is a vehicle for diversity: private school parents' choices were driven by their search for offerings -- e.g., moral values, religious instruction -- that public schools would not and could not, in the latter case, offer.

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BRIEF NO. 5

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE  
CHOICE AND COMPETITION  
SCHOOL-PARENT RELATIONS  
CHOICE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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CHUBB, J.E., and MOE, T.E. (1985). Politics, Markets and the Organization of Schools. Stanford University, School of Education, Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance. Project Report No. 85-A15. National Institute of Education, Grant No. NIE-G-83-0003.

This study surveyed principals and staff from 500 public and private high schools that were a representative sample of the much larger set of public and private high schools studied by Coleman and others.\* The Coleman study found that students in Catholic high schools gained a year or more on standardized tests measuring achievement in verbal and mathematic skills, compared to public school students. Moreover, the comparative achievement gains were more pronounced for blacks and Hispanics and for students from low-income

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\* J.S. Coleman, T. Hoffer, and S. Kilgore (1982). High School Achievement. New York: Basic Books.

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families. The Coleman study found that this could not be explained by differences in expulsion and dropout rates: the dropout rate was much higher for public school students; students with disciplinary problems in Catholic schools were more likely to be enrolled in the same school two years later.

While these findings have not gone unchallenged, even the most critical meta-analysis has concluded that there are significant differences in achievement among minority and low-income students who attend Catholic rather than public high schools. (See, for example, T.S. Keith and E. Page (1985). "Do Catholic High Schools Improve Minority Student Achievement?" American Educational Research Journal, Volume 22.) As a result, many proponents of expanding parent choice through public subsidies allowing parents to purchase private education have used these findings to argue that equity considerations support initiatives that would expand the financial ability of low-income parents to enroll their children in tuition-charging private schools.

The study that is the focus of this brief asks, "if public and private schools differ in their effects on student achievement, what accounts for the difference?" One possible difference is suggested by the research on instructionally effective schools conducted by the late Ronald Edmonds and his colleagues. That research identified principals' exercise of instructional leadership as a key ingredient of instructionally effective schools. Another key ingredient is clarity of school goals and consistency of expectations.

Chubb and Moe's survey of principals and staff in their sample of 500 public and private schools did find statistically and theoretically significant differences between public and private schools with respect to principals' exercise of the instructional leadership role.

- Private school principals have in general more discretionary authority than public school principals.
- Private school principals have significantly more teaching experience than public school principals.
- Public school principals are more likely to see their role as managers, representatives and peacekeepers among competing constituencies, whereas private school principals are more likely to describe their job as one of educational leadership and exercise of professional judgement.
- Private school principals reported fewer barriers to hiring, motivating and dismissing teaching staff than did public school principals.
- Teachers in private schools are more likely to turn to the principal as an instructional expert, are more likely to feel that they have more influence over decisions about school program and policies, and feel they have more discretion within the classroom.

Another key ingredient of school effectiveness is a shared sense of mission expressed in clear goals and consistency of expectations. The study also found systematic differences between

private and public schools with respect to goals and expectations:

- Private school teachers are more likely than public school teachers to say that the goals of their school are consistent and clearly communicated.
- Private school teachers are more in agreement among themselves about what their school's goals are or should be.
- Disciplinary policies are more ambiguous in public schools than in private: public school students are less likely to know what comprises school policy than private school students, who are also more likely to regard the policies as fair and effective.

The above differences between public and private schools were in the theoretically predicted direction -- i.e., private schools had more of the ingredients correlated with school effectiveness, thus providing an initial explanation for the achievement differences found by Coleman, et al. (1982). Private schools' greater ability to establish the practices associated with school effectiveness is due to the fact that they operate in a less complicated and less turbulent environment, one without the accountability pressures that impinge upon public schools. Specifically, this study found that:

- Public school principals feel a great deal more constraint and cross-pressure from "outside of the school authorities" than do private school principals.
- Despite the fact that private school parents can exercise "consumer sovereignty" and can exit at any time, public school principals are more likely than private school principals to see

parents, or segments of the school's parents, as one of the most influential groups that they have to deal with.

- Private school parents tend to expect more from their children, and to monitor their school work more closely.
- Private schools are less constrained in the remedies they may grant to reasonable parent grievances, and report many fewer parent demands.
- More private schools than public schools reported that their relationships with parents are "essentially cooperative."

In summary, private schools have a less turbulent environment. Their ways of dealing with this environment are therefore less bureaucratic and this makes it possible for those schools to exhibit those traits, such as strong instructional leadership, and goal clarity and consensus associated with effective schooling. The element of parent choice is obviously a factor in the more peaceful environment enjoyed by private schools.

But the implications of this conclusion for the policy issues that are the focus of this digest are not straightforward. First, with respect to the relationship of parent choice vis-a-vis the more peaceful environment enjoyed by private schools, the cause and effect relationship is not clear. As the study itself concludes:

"Private school parents are more likely than public school parents to be in a school's environment by choice -- because they prefer it to the alternatives, and relatively speaking because they like it. Private school parents are also, to

some degree, chosen by the school. Private schools explicitly control their student populations, and are free to exclude students whose parents are difficult or otherwise undesirable." (Chubb and Moe, 1985: 16. Emphasis not in the original.)

Second, it is not clear whether introducing parent choice into the public school sector alone, or letting public and private schools compete, will generate pressures that will allow public schools to develop the traits associated with effectiveness. Indeed, the resulting competition could add one more element of turbulence to the public school's environment thereby reducing its ability to develop an identity and engage in the strategies needed to develop effectiveness. That the latter is not just a hypothetical possibility, but has been suggested by Metz's 1986 study of magnet schools (see Brief No. 6, below), in which central office monitoring of which parents chose which magnet schools led it to pressure the one school with the most clearly defined goals to water down the distinctiveness of its program. Other support for this line of analysis comes from other more broad-based studies of magnet schools by Blank (1984a) and New York State (1984), please see Brief Nos. 2 and 7, respectively. In both studies, magnet school program quality was associated with special dispensations allowing magnets to bypass certain district-wide rules and conventions. A similar phenomenon was noted in Raywid's (1982) nationwide survey of 1200 public alternative high schools.

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BRIEF NO. 6

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

MAGNET SCHOOLS

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE AND DIVERSITY  
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METZ, M.H. (1986). Different By Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

This in-depth ethnographic study of the internal organization, evolution and life-cycle of three middle school magnets illuminates the forces that promote and inhibit the ability of public schools of choice to offer and maintain distinctive educational programs. It also sheds light on what factors influence parent choice, and on whether choice promotes equity, not just in the sense of racial desegregation, but also in the sense of increasing across-the-board access to high quality education for more parents.

Choice and Diversity

Initially all three schools did offer distinct options. The study sample included an "individually guided education (IGE)" program, an open education program, and a gifted and talented program. In two out of the three cases, the internal operations of the school were

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distinctive and in sync with the magnet theme label.

### Choice and Equity

(1) Racial Integration: By definition, these programs resulted in greater racial balance at these schools since they became magnets. But this was a result of a desegregation plan whose chief features were mandatory busing of minorities from closed-down central city schools to under-utilized and previously all-white schools in the outlying neighborhoods, and a quota system controlling admissions to the schools studied.

(2) Increased Access to Education that Parents Valued: The presence of magnets and of the element of parent choice they represented, improved accesss of not only black, but also poor white, students to educational programs that their parents found to be superior. As the study concludes, "Now, instead of needing a white skin and enough money to buy or rent a place to live in the city's most expensive neighborhoods to get into schools with the best reputations, parents needed only to watch for enrollment periods, to fill out an extremely simple form which could be turned in at the neighborhood school, and be willing to send their child to a distant school. While the ability to do these things is still correlated to some extent with social class, it discriminates far less than do qualifications associated with housing." (Metz, 1986: 209)

### Factors Influencing Parent Choice

Among the parents interviewed in this study, it seemed that a school's prior reputation as excellent, parents' desire to enroll their children in schools with students of high social class and achievement level, and location -- proximity to the home -- were all factors that were more salient than the school's magnet theme.

Specifically, this study found that:

- The introduction of magnet schools led only a few parents to make choices of schools on the basis of new criteria introduced by the magnet schools' themes.
- The school with the least distinctive program, i.e., its internal practices belied its label, developed the longest waiting list. The study notes that "many middle-class and ambitious working-class families sought a school where their children would be with children of the highest social class and achievement level possible . . . ." (Metz, 1986: 208)
- The school with the initially most distinctive program drew most of its clients from families within its working-class neighborhoods who cited proximity to home rather than any knowledge or appreciation of the school's program and theme.

### Factors Promoting and Inhibiting Diversity

First, diversity and distinctiveness cannot be created through administrative fiat. Distinctiveness or diversity providing parents with real options upon which to exercise choice is most readily

created by a teaching staff that is committed to the program. Hence, some element of teacher choice is necessary to expand the range of parent choice.

The school system perceptions about what "all" parents and citizens want -- namely, improved test scores -- led to district-wide mandates about the means necessary to achieve this common goal. These mandates forced the school with the most distinctive program to water down its unique character and adopt methods and procedures common to all schools, but at odds with its own theme.

Third, and most ironically, the element of competition provided by even the limited parent choice plan examined in this study, led to pressures to standardize and homogenize rather than diversify educational programs.

This happened as a result of the dual goals of providing choice and options, and promoting desegregation. The pressure to balance both considerations led the central administration of the school district to closely monitor enrollment patterns and waiting list information. The administration's response to these data about consumer behavior led it to push the school with the most distinct program with the shortest waiting list, to become more "like" the school with the least distinctive program which had the longest waiting list.

BRIEF NO. 7

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

MAGNET SCHOOLS

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT, EQUITY,

AND SCHOOL-PARENT/COMMUNITY RELATIONS

NEW YORK STATE MAGNET SCHOOL RESEARCH STUDY. Prepared for the New York State Education Department by MAGI Educational Services, Inc. January 1985.

This study of state-supported magnet school programs yields an in-depth investigation of three central questions: Do magnet schools promote quality education? Do they promote increased parent participation? Do they promote racial/ethnic balance?

Pupil outcome, racial composition, and parent participation and satisfaction data were collected from 41 magnet schools in eight school districts in New York. Data sources included archival review of school records from 1972 to 1975, current pupil achievement data, and staff and parent questionnaires. Conclusions were drawn on the basis of comparisons over time -- changes in pupil outcomes, programs, racial composition, parent involvement and satisfaction -- in the schools which had become magnets during the period from 1972 to 1985,

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FROM: **Parent Choice: A Digest of the Research**, prepared by the Institute for Responsive Education, 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, (617) 353-3309. Work on this publication was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Grant No. 0085-104-14. The analyses and opinions expressed herein do not however necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

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and by comparisons between evenly matched magnet and non-magnet schools in the same school districts. The major findings are as follows.

#### Do Magnet Schools Promote School Improvement?

- (1) Pupil Achievement: Test data show statistically significant increases in student performance, after the introduction of a magnet program in the school. The majority of magnet schools had higher achievement scores than their district average.
- (2) Equity in Achievement: Average levels of achievement in magnet schools with high minority enrollment was equal to other schools with low minority enrollment.
- (3) Dropout Rates: Nearly three-quarters of the magnet schools had dropout rates below the district average.
- (4) Student Attendance: Ninety-eight percent of the 41 schools had higher attendance rates than their district averages.

#### Do Magnet Schools Promote Parent Participation and Support?

- (1) Participation: In nearly half of the schools studied, 50 percent or more of the parents were reported to participate regularly in school-related activities.
- (2) Support and Satisfaction: Ninety-eight percent of the parents reported a very high rate of satisfaction with the schools. The same proportion said they would recommend that school to other parents.

### Do Magnets Promote Racial Balance?

High minority enrollment schools with an average minority enrollment of 90 percent in 1973 reduced their enrollment to 54 percent by 1985 after becoming magnets. All majority schools increased their minority enrollment by 29 percent. The current racial composition in all of the magnet schools studied was within five percentage points of the districtwide composition, even though prior to magnet program development, two-thirds of those schools were more than 50 percent out of sync with the districtwide racial composition of the student body.

### Magnet Schools and Diversity

The New York State study team found that most magnets did have a strong program identity, what they called "distinctiveness," and consequently had an essential feature in common with the "effective schools" as identified in the research of the late Ronald Edmonds and others. The feature is a clear sense of mission that is reflected in school practices and is understood and supported by staff and parents. The study found that this distinctiveness was what was magnetic about those schools: more than 80 percent of the 625 parents who were surveyed correctly identified the district goals, philosophy, curricular theme, and teaching style of the magnet schools, and gave one of those factors as their reason for choosing that school.

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BRIEF NO. 8

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

COSTS, EQUITY, DIVERSITY

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RAYWID, M.A. (1982). The Current Status of Schools of Choice in Public Secondary Education. Project on Alternatives in Education, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York 11550.\*

This is the most comprehensive and recent national survey of public alternative schools. Its findings, based on survey returns from 1200 schools and alternative "schools-within-schools" are as follows:

(1) Alternatives do provide choice: students in 79 percent of the responding schools were there by choice (the remaining 21 percent is accounted for by the fact that some "alternatives" represent in-school suspension programs, or dropout prevention programs into which students are placed). Just as interestingly, 85 percent of the

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\* Summary discussions of the study can also be found in: M.A. Raywid (1984), "Synthesis of Research on Schools of Choice," Educational Leadership (April); M.A. Raywid (1983), "Schools of Choice: Their Current Nature and Prospects," Phi Delta Kappan (June).

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schools surveyed indicated that their teaching staff was there by choice.

(2) Alternative schools do provide diversity: while half of the responding schools report no particular curriculum specialization, 57 percent identify a specific teaching method as their distinguishing feature.

(3) School climate is improved in alternative schools: 90 percent of the responding staff members showed a high degree of job satisfaction and close identification with the schools' program and theme. Ninety percent of the teachers also reported that they were willing to take on responsibilities beyond their established job descriptions. Student attendance also showed an improvement in 81 percent of the responding schools.

(4) Alternative schools appear to be no more segregated by race or class than regular schools. Although the survey found that most alternatives were started in order to accommodate a "special needs" population, they have since evolved into serving a broad spectrum of students.

Specifically, with respect to race, no responding school was overwhelmingly dominated by an racial or linguistic minority.

With respect to class, there was evidence of some stratification within individual schools:

- No single socioeconomic class was dominant (i.e., 60 percent of the student body) in 38 percent of the schools.
- In 37 percent of the schools, 60 percent or more of the students



came from lower-class homes.

- In 24 percent of the schools, 60 percent or more of the students came from middle-class families.
- One percent of the schools were predominantly upper-class schools.

Thus, on this all-important issue of whether choice promotes stratification or integration, the study concludes that:

"It thus appears that more than a third of public alternative schools are mixed, rather than single-class schools; almost an equal number are distinctively 'working class' schools; and a fourth are middle class schools. But again, whether this reflects more or less stratification than other schools in the same areas is not known." (Raywid, 1982: 13)

(5) Finally, alternatives do not appear to be more costly than regular schools: in 62 percent of the cases, per-student costs are equal to or less than in other local programs, despite the fact that most (69 percent) are small schools enrolling fewer than 200 students.

BRIEF NO. 9

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

MAGNET SCHOOLS

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE

CHOICE AND EQUITY

PARENT PREFERENCES

ROSSELL, C.H. (1985) "What is Attractive About Magnet Schools?" Urban Education, April.

This review of over 100 evaluation and research reports on magnet schools has identified systematic differences in parental preferences among different races and classes of parents, and by so doing has identified what kinds of educational choice can promote integration. The important factors are as follows.

(1) Location: This is the most important variable. Whites are not attracted to minority neighborhood schools and similarly minorities are not attracted to schools in all-white neighborhoods except under special circumstances. These special circumstances include:

(a) Facility: A new or upgraded facility is universally attractive to all groups, irrespective of its location.

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(b) Staffing Patterns: Popular white principals with racially mixed staff attract white parents to magnets located in minority neighborhoods. Popular minority principals with racially mixed staff will attract minority parents to magnets located in all-white neighborhoods.

(c) Curriculum and Program: Rossell's findings on this factor reinforce the conclusions drawn from studies of voucher experiments as to the presence of persisting racial and class-based differences in educational preferences.

Specifically:

(i) Upper SES whites are attracted to child-centered, non-traditional educational programs.

(ii) Both lower SES whites and minorities in general favor a more traditional, direct-instruction program.

(iii) All groups are attracted to enrichment programs, e.g., gifted and talented, accelerated programs, or special emphases on math, science, or the arts.

(iv) Upper SES whites are more highly attracted to enrichment programs which seem to be selective.

With respect to the impact of choice on racial integration, the findings of Rossell and of the voucher studies show that class is a more important determinant of educational preference than is race, and that these preferences for a type of education can override a reluctance to enroll a child in a racially mixed school even if it is in a racially "different" neighborhood.

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BRIEF NO. 10

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS/DIVERSITY

IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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SMITH, H.V. (1978). "Do Optional Alternative Public Schools Work?"  
Childhood Education (54), 211-214.

This review of evaluation data on alternative public schools in 11 cities -- Cambridge (MA), Chicago, Hartford, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Providence, Philadelphia, St. Paul, Racine, Indianapolis, and Urbana (IL) -- suggests a qualified "yes" to the question posed in the title.

The alternatives examined included: "open", Montessori, individualized continuous progress, "Summerhill" and traditional back-to-basics schools. The conclusions are of this study are as follows:

- Alternative public schools did have discernible differences in philosophy and practice, corresponding to their labels.
- Alternative schools experienced a reduction in discipline problems, in drop-out rates, and an increase in attendance.
- Pupil outcomes in alternative settings were better than in other schools in the school system serving comparable pupils.

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- Pupils placed in alternative schools achieved higher grade point averages, higher SAT scores, and higher levels of reading and math achievement.

These conclusions are tentative since the author admitted to gaps in the research base, and that since this was an evaluation of other evaluations, indicators were not always consistent across the studies being reviewed. Nonetheless, this study lends support to the proposition that parent choice, if it leads to the kind of diversity which recognized different learning styles, does lead to improved student outcomes.

UCHITELLE, S. (1978). "Policy Implications for School Districts Affording Public School Options: A Case Study of Results of School Choice in One Community." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Toronto. ED 151 935\*

This is one of a handful of studies which offer insight into what factors influence parent behavior in making educational choices, when choices are available within the public sector. Its findings shed light on the following questions:

- (1) What kinds of parents are most apt to be informed about and avail themselves of choice options?
- (2) What factors influence how parents make choices?

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\* The paper cited is based on: Susan Uchitelle, The School Choice Behavior of Parents Afforded a Public School Option. Dissertation at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Washington University, St. Louis, MO. December, 1977.

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Specifically, the study sought to identify the extent to which rational consumer behavior models of choice -- i.e., parents' search and judgement about what school option best meets their preference --overrode what the previous research had identified as the most powerful, yet in terms of the rational consumer model, most non-rational determinants of choice, namely: distance from the school and racial composition of that school and its neighborhood.

The study's findings and conclusions were based on focused interviews with a sample of 48 mothers in one heterogeneous Midwestern school district who were in the position to exercise a first choice. These parents were newly arrived in the district or they were long-time residents whose first child was about to enter the school system. They lived in neighborhoods in which parents, because of unplanned and contingent reasons, had the option of sending their child to any school within the district. The sample represented the socioeconomic and racial census of public school subscribing families in that district.

The major findings and conclusions of the study are as follows:

#### Who Exercises Choice

The "who" refers to groups of parents identified by racial/ethnic, and SES background as indicated by income level and educational attainment. The findings are as follows.

- The school system made no effort to reach out and inform parents who had the right to choose.

- Minority and lower SES parents were less likely to know about the opportunities for choice, and hence less likely to exercise their choice options.

### What Factors Influence Choice

This study was designed to test the "null hypothesis" that among those parent who were aware of and did exercise choice, the overriding considerations would be: distance/location of the school chosen; racial composition of the school or its neighborhood; and personal influence -- word-of-mouth reports of what a potential school of choice was like and what it offered.

Given the absence of school district initiated outreach, personal influence -- in the form of word-of-mouth information -- was an important but not overriding influence on parent choice decisions. It was important because in the majority of cases, word-of-mouth information was the first cue about the availability of choice and about the kind of choices available. But in a majority of cases in which choice was actually exercised, parents used other sources of information including visits to schools.

Uchitelle's study found a pattern of class-based difference: while most parents were aware that they had a choice, these tended to be white and extremely well-educated. The 29 percent of the sample who were not aware that they had a choice tended to be much less well-educated and minority.

Among those parents who were aware of options and who did make a



choice, location and distance were the least important factors. The two most important factors were school program and philosophy, which matched parents' educational values, and the school's racial/ethnic heterogeneity. Pro-active consumers in this sample saw diversity of student population as a benefit that they wanted for their children.

## SECTION FIVE:

### BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

#### Introduction and User's Note

All major references have been cited in the body of this digest. The following bibliography contains a summary listing of those works, and of the most relevant secondary sources.

Many of the theories, proposals and reports on the research cited throughout this digest have appeared in different forms and formats, e.g., books, articles, conference papers. In each such case of a multiple presentation of the same basic content, we list the references that is most accessible to the targeted audiences of this digest. This means that where the basic content is the same, we list the shorter rather than the longer version -- i.e., a journal article rather than the book.

For similar reasons of accessibility, we list the original journal article reference for those items which appeared in edited anthologies, but were originally produced as a journal article.

We tilt towards journal articles because books go out of print, and are lost from borrowing libraries, while journal articles stay on the shelf for longer periods of time.

A more serious issue of accessibility arises because, on this topic, as is often the case with education policy issues, the most "to-the-point" and current literature is "fugitive" and has not yet made it into the mainstream of the publishing or journal industry.

"Fugitive" literature consists of conference presentations and, most often, products of federal, state, and local education agency sponsored research and evaluation.

Fortunately, much of this "fugitive" literature is stored and accessible through the U.S. Department of Education's ERIC system. In many cases, readers will find a citation ending with the letters "ED", followed by a six digit number. This is an ERIC catalog number for that document. ERIC stands for the Educational Resource Information Center. ERIC is much like a very large mail-order bookstore which collects and disseminates hard-to-get and unpublished documents -- ranging from seminar papers and speeches to project reports to book-length documents. Copies of materials referenced with an "ED" number may be obtained from:

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

The series of publications, "Parent Choice and the Public Schools," of which this volume is a part, has been developed and published by the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE).

IRE is a Boston-based national, non-profit research and advocacy organization with a 14 year history of work designed to make schools more responsive to citizen and parent involvement and concerns. Although private and independent, IRE is housed at Boston University, where its President and founder, Don Davies, formerly Deputy Commissioner in the United States Office of Education, is now Professor in the School of Education. All of IRE's work centers on two premises: that parent and citizen participation is an essential ingredient in school improvement and that citizen access to information is indispensable for efficient participation.

IRE conducts several other projects focusing on parent choice. The magazine Equity and Choice (three times a year) reports on much of this work. Working closely with school districts around the country, IRE provides technical assistance and consulting aimed at promoting parental choice within public school systems. Participating school systems and interested others have also joined a network, the National Partnership for Parent Choice in the Public Schools, to share their experiences and insights. For information on any of these activities, contact:

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